



Introduction

This chapter provides an introduction to Marxist theory, including the contributions of Gramsci and Lukács, followed by an overview of the most prominent theorists of the Frankfurt School, such as Horkheimer, Adorno, Fromm, and Marcuse. After discussing the perspectives of Marxist-oriented authors, the chapter provides a detailed explanation of the conflict theory proposed by Dahrendorf, a liberal author, and Coser. Immediately after, a detailed space will be devoted to Habermas, the last great exponent of the Frankfurt School. However, Habermas has undergone many intellectual influences over time, and today, it is no longer possible to classify him as a “Marxist.”

The text will also refer to Michel Foucault, Noam Chomsky, and Charles Wright Mills to explain how the general conception of power has changed in the history of sociology over time. Those three authors will help us clarify the differences between two ways of conceiving the study of power: Manifest and hidden power.

The chapter ends by exploring the hidden power of society through Pierre Bourdieu’s sociology, which illuminates the secret mechanisms used by the ruling class to reproduce its power. We will analyze eight concepts proposed by Bourdieu: Field, capital, habitus, symbolic power, symbolic violence, hysteresis, distinction, and reproduction. Finally, to make Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic violence clearer, I will talk about the ethnographic research I conducted in the pediatric ward of a public hospital in central Italy to study the relationship between pregnant immigrants of the Islamic religion and Italian gynecologists.

Four Key Ideas of Conflict Theories

Conflict theory is considered the main alternative to functionalist theory.

Conflict theorists share four fundamental ideas.

The first idea is that conflict arises from resource scarcity. Since a low supply and high demand of a limited resource will always exist, conflict cannot be eliminated from the human condition. Even when a scarce resource becomes abundant and available to all, humans invent new needs that require to be satisfied with new resources. The conflict never ends, and politics is the government of the conflict. A minority of individuals will always determine the allocation of scarce resources, and their influence will eventually resurface even if temporarily suppressed.

The second idea, arising from the first, is that society is a battlefield for groups competing for power, conceived as the system's center. When the power shifts, the system wobbles and loses its balance. Power is a scarce resource and is unequally distributed. The power struggle is mainly intended as a zero-sum game with a few exceptions. If one side advances, the other moves back.

The third idea is the centrality of interests that can be material or immaterial. Groups and individuals struggle to defend artistic, symbolic, academic, and identity interests.

The fourth idea is that values are a weapon that dominant groups use to struggle for power. For conflict theorists, values are imposed on society by organized minorities. If the organized minorities holding power change, so do the values.

Conflict theory is a predominantly, but not exclusively, macro-sociological and deductive approach. Marx, Weber, and Simmel greatly influenced contemporary conflict theory (Binns 1977; Turner 2003). Pareto played a significant role in developing conflict theory, which still requires further attention.

Gramsci and the Theory of Cultural Hegemony

Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937) expresses very well the idea of culture as a weapon to fight a war, thanks also to the military metaphors present in his theory of cultural hegemony, which, as we are about to see, was not systematically elaborated by Gramsci and this, as Thomas R. Bates wrote, requires the historian to transform himself into an “archaeologist” (Bates 1975, 351) to dig through the scattered notes now known as the Prison Notebooks about the relation between culture and power under capitalism (Lears 1985, 568).

Among the founders of the Communist Party of Italy in Livorno in 1921, Gramsci admired Lenin's dictatorship, which he considered an “episode of freedom,” and did his utmost to promote the conditions of the proletarian revolution in Italy as well. He sanctifies the figure of Lenin and has close ties with Moscow, where he was invited in 1922 to represent the Italian Communists at the Communist International. Having become secretary of the Communist Party of Italy and a member of the Chambers of Deputies in 1924, he initiated the “bolshevization” of the party (Bates 1976) and proposed overthrowing the government with a popular strike during the Matteotti crisis. The fascist regime arrested him in 1926 and sentenced him to twenty years of imprisonment in 1928.

Gramsci has an integralist conception of politics, which, in his opinion, should interpenetrate private and public life (Lepre 2000, 64). To understand the causes of

the communist defeat, he reflected on the characteristics assumed by capitalist societies in the 1920s and 1930s and, in February 1929, began writing the *Prison Notebooks*, in which he elaborated the theory of cultural hegemony, according to which, in societies with a complex and articulated civil organization, the violent conquest of the state apparatus alone is not sufficient to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat led by the Communist Party of Italy, as the political prelude to the establishment of communism.

For Gramsci, the state is an “advanced trench,” which hides the “sturdy chain of fortresses and casemates” of bourgeois society, whose power is based on a complex web of social and cultural relations. The coup d’état, which Lenin had carried out in Russia in 1917 by storming the Winter Palace, would not be possible in the West, where the bourgeoisie, due to its social roots, requires to be attacked with a war of position, not with a war of maneuver (Gramsci 2001b, vol II, 866).

By the war of maneuver, Gramsci meant the frontal mobilization against the bourgeois state to conquer the barracks, the presidential palaces, and the police offices. By war of position, however, he means a war of attrition, like the one fought in the trenches by soldiers of World War I (Gramsci 2001a, vol. I, 120).

Behind the state is a highly articulated civil society, which must be conquered with cultural weapons. The Communist Party must occupy key positions in the domain of culture, information, and teaching to supplant any alternative conception to the Marxist one through “an unprecedented concentration of hegemony” (Gramsci 2001b, vol II, 802). Political control of culture is the means of changing the “common sense” of millions of people in favor of Marxism. Although he did not question the principle that, in the long run, the productive forces play the most important role, Gramsci is appreciated for having attributed importance to the superstructure that other Marxists were unwilling to recognize. Gramsci’s great discovery—Michael Walzer pointed out—consisted of having understood the importance of bourgeois civil society, its depth, its complexity, and its true solidity (Walzer 1988, 82).

In the more advanced states: “The superstructures of civil society—Gramsci writes—are like the system of trenches in modern warfare. As in this, it happened that a fierce artillery attack seemed to have destroyed the entire opponent’s defensive system but had only instead destroyed its outer surface” (Gramsci 2001c, vol. III, 1615).

To better understand the power that Gramsci attributes to culture, it is necessary to know the role he attributed to intellectuals in political conflict. The basic premise of the theory of hegemony is that man is not governed by force alone but also by ideas.

Gramsci and the Role of Intellectuals

Gramsci distinguishes the superstructure into two major planes: Political society and civil society (Gramsci 2001a, vol. I, 662).

Political society includes the apparatus of coercive power or the state, the government, the police, and the army. Civil society, on the other hand, includes the branches of ideology (science, law, art, theater, folklore, religion, philosophy, culture) and organizations (schools, libraries, media, and universities). A “primitive and gelatinous” civil society, a fragile superstructure, can be subjugated by conquering the state, just as Lenin did in 1917.

When civil society is not very compact, its resistance against revolutionaries is weak and simple control of the state is sufficient to guarantee communist domination. The problem arises when civil society is well organized. This is the case in European societies, where it can happen that, behind a “shaky” state, a vigorous civil society is hiding. In this case, the war of maneuver is inadequate because the state has disseminated bourgeois values in every corner of the system, thanks also to an insidious counter-revolutionary strategy, which improves the living conditions of the workers and grants them more rights and less afflictive exploitation.

What to do in favor of the communist revolution?

To wage an effective cultural war, intellectuals are needed. Still, they are not a unitary class but a social grouping that adheres to different classes. Some intellectuals are aligned with the new ruling class; others are linked to the old ruling class; others are linked to the dominant class. Gramsci writes that every social group, born on the ground of economic production, creates a class of intellectuals from which it receives greater homogeneity and self-awareness about its function in the economic, social, and political fields. To these intellectuals, Gramsci gives the name of “organic intellectuals.” The organic intellectual par excellence of bourgeois society is the capitalist entrepreneur, to whom Gramsci attributes the ability to organize society from the ground up to the top of the state. As is evident, Gramsci has a very broad conception of the intellectual.

Organic intellectuals, the main civil society organizers, try to bring rival intellectuals to their side. A class is “hegemonic” when it persuades the whole of society that its particular interests coincide with the general interest (Mouffe 1979, 181). In this way, the hegemonic class can use the forces of its potential enemies to strengthen hegemony over them, even if it is sometimes forced to give up some privileges to feed the pretense of sharing the same pains as other social classes. The triumph of the system occurs when “common sense”—that is, the uncritically absorbed worldview—is full of bourgeois values and produces taken-for-granted ways of thinking on which individuals build their daily relationships. We will find this same idea in Pierre Bourdieu. Gramsci speaks of “objectivity of the external world” rooted in the people by religion and traditional philosophies; Bourdieu speaks of “natural order,” but the idea is the same: The ruling class makes the power relations obvious, objective, natural, and, therefore, indisputable. How could we fight against something so hidden in us that it escapes our gaze?

Gramsci was influenced by Machiavelli.

Where Machiavelli looks to the Prince as the founder of a new Italy, Gramsci refers to the Communist Party as the “Modern Prince” (Gramsci 2001c, vol. III, 1561), who should found the new communist society. Gramsci also takes from Machiavelli the image of power as the mythical Centaur half man, half beast, to

indicate that the state requires to be guided by a combination of consent and coercion (Gramsci 2001c, vol. III, 1576). When the consensual aspect of power prevails, hegemony is giving its best results because people act spontaneously in compliance with the hegemonic order imposed by the ruling class, which does not have to make special efforts to reproduce its own privileges. In this case, coercion continues to exist as a latent force, which is applied only in rare cases of deviance (Cox 1983, 164).

The Gramscian intellectual has the task of fighting against common sense, which Gramsci also calls the “philosophy of non-philosophers,” “philosophy of the man in the street,” and “spontaneous philosophy”—but which, in a word, is popular wisdom, which shapes the moral universe of the average man. The organic intellectual fully fulfills its function when it contributes to constituting a “historical bloc” or when the structure and the superstructure are firmly linked and well organized around the ruling class.

Gramsci believes that the Communist Party must equip itself with its organic intellectuals to challenge the bourgeoisie on the ideological level and prepare a new historical bloc (Canfora 1987). Without a mass revolutionary culture, the proletariat’s cause will not advance. The organic intellectual, however, is subject to the Communist Party, on which he depends and which he/she must obey. Cultural as it may be, it is still a war that requires discipline. This is why obedience, organization, and submission to a higher authority are required of the Gramscian intellectual. For Gramsci, the Communist Party must replace “divinity” in every conscience (Gramsci 2001c, vol. III, 1561). Gramsci is the enemy of bourgeois common sense, which he wants to eradicate with the war of position waged on the ground of civil society to impose a new common sense based on Marxism, which he also calls the “philosophy of praxis.”

Gramsci was attracted by the *pars construens* of the struggle for a new cultural hegemony, in which he saw the great creative contribution of communist intellectuals to the revolutionary cause. For Gramsci, the word “ideology” is not necessarily to be condemned. He repudiated the hegemonic ideology advocated by bourgeois intellectuals but not the counter-hegemonic ideology he hoped to bring to subordinate groups (Crehan 2002, 99–106). With the term “subordinate,” Gramsci indicates those social groups that the bourgeoisie crushes with relative ease due to their fragmentation and lack of organization. The subordinate groups suffer the proactivity of the opposing groups and settle on defensive positions. In Gramsci’s conception, what is decisive are not insurrectional events but the revolutionary process, which must break up the bourgeois world from the inside because: “In politics, the ‘war of position,’ once won, is definitively decisive” (Gramsci 2001b, vol. II, 802).

The importance attributed to the political party, intellectuals, and the state allows Gramsci to reject the interpretation of historical materialism in a deterministic key. Gramsci has a decidedly elitist conception of the role and function of the intellectual. The masses are always masses, even from a Leninist perspective, and must be educated, directed, and culturally regimented from above.

Box 10.1 Gramsci and the Dictatorship

Even Gramsci, like Mussolini, believed in a dictatorship. It is a Marxist-Leninist dictatorship, but a dictatorship led from above. As Bates wrote, based on a careful reading of the *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci was not concerned with how fascism seized power but rather that Mussolini had defeated the communists (Bates 1975, 359). Bates made an astute observation regarding the theory of cultural hegemony, which does not condemn the Bolshevik dictatorship, not even implicitly (Orsini 2012). According to Gramsci, the method used by Lenin to take control of the Russian state in 1917 through a direct attack cannot be replicated in Western societies. Gramsci argues that even if this method were to be successful, communist rule would not last long because the opposition from the bourgeois civil society would weaken the foundations of the new state. On the one hand, Gramsci proposes the war of position to conquer power in Italy; on the other hand, he celebrates the 1917 war of movement in Russia and the Bolshevik dictatorship. The two are not mutually exclusive, not even from a logical point of view. Gramsci never thought anything was wrong with the communist dictatorship, and he has always been an enemy of socialist reformism and liberal democracy.

Lukács: Reification and Class Consciousness

In 1922, before Gramsci began writing the *Prison Notebooks*, Lukács published *History and Class Consciousness*, where he exalted the importance of subjective factors in the Marxist theory of the revolutionary process. Lukács, also hostile to economic determinism, explains that the revolution requires the proletariat to assume class consciousness. As long as the proletarians do not understand the nature of their exploitation in a capitalist society, they cannot pass from class in itself to class for itself and compact themselves. Lukács also attaches the utmost importance to the cultural clash that takes place in the superstructure and, in fact, writes that the bourgeoisie struggles with all its forces, including the ideological and scientific ones, to prevent the proletariat from developing its own ideology, that is, to prevent the union of theory and praxis.

According to Lukács, the acquisition of class consciousness also implies the struggle against reification, the socio-psychological process through which individuals are convinced that the social structures they themselves create have an autonomous and independent life. It is men, Lukács argues, who produce the commodities and give them value. Commodities and the market are not autonomous and objective forces with respect to social actors. The concept of commodity fetishism in Marx underlies the concept of reification in Lukács, with the difference that commodity fetishism refers to the economic world. In contrast, reification refers to all spheres of society, including the state and law. Breaking free from the grip of

reification allows workers to imagine a world without the bourgeoisie state, police, capitalism, profit, etc. Reification leads the proletariat to resignation, believing that the reified bourgeois world is the only possible world (Lukács 1972, 110).

In Gramsci and Lukács, the thought and actions of individuals are very important.

Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* presents a real celebration of ideology. The proletariat would be lost without ideology, a word that takes on a supremely positive meaning when it performs a revolutionary function. Subjective factors are fundamental to the revolutionary process. Ideology is power. More precisely, ideology is an intellectual weapon that leads to victory. The growing understanding of the essence of society represents a constant increase in power for the proletariat, because for the proletariat, and only for the proletariat, a correct understanding of the essence of society is a factor of first-rate power. It is perhaps the ultimately decisive weapon. For Lukács, it is not enough that the economic conditions are favorable to the overthrow of the bourgeoisie. "When the final economic crisis of capitalism has begun, then the fate of the revolution, and that of humanity, depends on the ideological maturity of the proletariat, from its class consciousness" (Lukács [1923] 1972, 70).

In Lukács's words:

Reification is, then, the necessary, immediate reality of every person living in capitalist society. [...] For when confronted by the overwhelming resources of knowledge, culture and routine which the bourgeoisie undoubtedly possesses and will continue to possess as long as it remains the ruling class, the only effective superiority of the proletariat, its only decisive weapon is its ability to see the social totality as a concrete historical totality; to see the reified forms as processes between men. (Lukács 1972, 197)

Gramsci and Lukács reject the idea that the collapse of capitalism is a mechanical fact that Marxism can predict with the same level of certainty with which the physical sciences predict natural phenomena. Their approach is dialectical: Economics and politics influence each other, although the former is always more important than the latter in the long run.

Box 10.2: Economic Determinism

A biographical reason also explains the attack on economic determinism by Gramsci and Lukács. The triumph of economic determinism in Marxist circles would have made the life of Gramsci, who was a professional revolutionary, useless. His job was to organize the communist revolution. If the collapse of capitalism had come about deterministically, the usefulness of his role would have ceased.

Lukács was also a very active militant who had dedicated his life to the communist revolution. His submission to the Communist Party was such that he publicly abjured his ideas on multiple occasions. In 1924, after the Communist International had accused him of idealism and revisionism through Zinoviev, Lukács hastened to withdraw *History and Class Consciousness* from circulation (Bedeschi 1970, 118–119). In the *Preface* to the first Italian edition of *History and Class Consciousness*, dated March 1967, Lukács revealed that he had always believed in his ideas and falsely condemned them for not being marginalized by the communist movement (Lukács 1967, XXXIII).

The Frankfurt School

While Gramsci was writing in fascist prisons, Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, and Fromm, German Jews belonging to the middle class, took refuge in the United States to escape Nazism (Wiggershaus 1994, 149). Their school of thought is known as the Frankfurt School or critical theory, a research tradition formed within the Institute for Social Research, founded in 1923 at the University of Frankfurt. Its founders would have liked to call it the Institute for Marxism, but then they chose a different name for academic convenience. The first official director of the Institute was Carl Grünberg, who, in his inaugural speech (1924), presented himself as a Marxist militant enemy of the bourgeois economic order, according to him, already condemned by history (Gay 1970, 41; Jay 1996, 10). The turning point came in 1930, when Grünberg was replaced by Max Horkheimer (1895–1973), under whose direction the Institute carried out his most famous research. The Frankfurt School soon became a theoretical movement spread across many universities worldwide (McLaughlin 1999, 109). Under the influence of Marxist philosophy, it focuses mainly on commodification, reification, and critique of mass culture.

Among the leading exponents of the first generation of the Frankfurt School are Theodor W. Adorno (1903–1969), who joined the Institute in the late 1920s; Marcuse (1898–1979) and Fromm (1900–1980), who arrived in the early 1930s, but also Walter Benjamin (1892–1940), Friedrich Pollock (1894–1970), and Leo Lowenthal (1900–1993). Habermas, who entered the Institute in 1956, is considered the last great exponent of the Frankfurt School, although he criticized his first teachers on many fundamental points. In the final pages of *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1981), Habermas wrote that the philosophy of history, to which the old critical theory was linked, is today “no longer tenable” (Habermas 1987, Vol. II, 397).

The Institute for Social Research closed in 1933 under the blows of Nazism and found refuge at Columbia University in New York. It was founded again in 1949 in Frankfurt by Horkheimer, who became its rector.

A clarification needs to be made.

Adorno, Horkheimer, Fromm, and Marcuse, all “big debtors” of Marx (Rusconi 1968, 27), published their essential ideas in the 1930s and early 1940s but were brought to triumph in the 1960s and 1970s when they were hailed as the masters of the revolutionary “new left.” However, Marcuse’s essay, “The Struggle Against Liberalism in the Totalitarian View of the State”—where he argues that the national-socialist state represents a logical conclusion of liberalism—is from 1934.

Marcuse discusses his fundamental idea, according to which the technological society is a society tending toward totalitarianism, in the article “Some Social Implications of Modern Technology,” published in 1941 in *Studies in Philosophy and Social Sciences* (Marcuse 1941), the English-language magazine created by the Institute for Social Research in the years of the American exile.

In this essay, we find almost all the ideas that Marcuse will exhibit in *One-Dimensional Man*, published in 1964 in the United States, meeting worldwide success (Marcuse 1964).

For his part, Fromm proposes to merge Freud's psychoanalysis with Marx's historical materialism in a 1932 article entitled "The Method and Function of an Analytic Social Psychology" (Fromm 1970; Bedeschi 2002, 22–38).

Fromm's book *Escape from Freedom* was published in 1941 in the United States (Fromm [1941] 1965). Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* was published in 1966 in Germany (Adorno [1966] 1983).

When student revolts broke out in the 1960s, thousands of leftist militants felt orphaned by a revolutionary ideology. Many of them could not identify with Stalin's or Mao's totalitarianism. Critical theorists, rejecting Stalinism, liberalism, and fascism, offered young people a communism that had never existed before and, therefore, cannot be criticized. The communism of critical theory was utopian communism, which allowed young protesters to experience the intoxicating condition of purity. Those who reject all existing societies place themselves in the position of not having to justify the society in which they believe, which in fact, does not exist.

Critical Theory: Research Activities and Peculiar Traits

It is always difficult to indicate the salient features of a cultural movement since each author has his/her peculiarities. However, the Frankfurt School has some typical traits.

In the final pages of *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas wrote that the research activity of the Institute for Social Research, from its inception until the early 1940s, when the group of collaborators disbanded in New York, was characterized by six fundamental themes (Habermas 1987, vol. II, 378–379):

- (a) The forms of integration of post-liberal societies;
- (b) Family socialization and ego development;
- (c) Mass media and mass culture;
- (d) The social psychology behind the cessation of protest;
- (e) The theory of art;
- (f) The critique of positivism and science.

Habermas's indications are useful for understanding the research interests of the first generation of the Frankfurt School, but not its peculiar traits. I will try to list the main ones as they appear to me:

Radical catastrophism. The world, for the "Frankfurters," has fallen into an abyss of unhappiness, alienation, ignorance, manipulation, and moral corruption.

Condemnation of Western civilization. The condemnation of the Frankfurt School begins with capitalism and extends to all aspects of Western civilization.

Equalization between fascism, Stalinism, and liberalism. Liberal society is described as a totalitarian society. Nazism is regarded as one of its developments.

Revolutionary Messianism. The new revolutionary subject is no longer the proletarians but the dissident intellectuals who break the chains of ignorance and help men build a humanly superior society.

Refusal of value-free sociology. From the perspective of the Frankfurt School, Weber is a champion of bourgeois ideology, and his precept of value-freedom must be rejected. The task of social scientists is not only to explain but also to judge and condemn. The theory is critical because it aims to “emancipation from slavery” (Horkheimer [1972] 2002, 246).

The myth of the new man. The absolute regeneration of man is accompanied by the myth of the “new man,” which helps to understand the interest of the Frankfurters in psychoanalysis and studies on personality. The study of the interaction between psychic drives and the economic structure is characteristic of their approach.

Autonomy of culture. The Frankfurt School theorists reject economic determinism and attribute considerable autonomy to the sphere of culture.

Criticism of science and rejection of technology. Frankfurters criticize science and see technology as a danger to human freedom.

Utopian thinking. The critical theorists of society are utopians, unlike Gramsci, who, despite having a utopia, was strongly realistic.

The Cultural Industry

Seldom is a chapter more famous than the book that includes it.

This is the case of the “cultural industry,” a chapter of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, published by Horkheimer and Adorno in 1947.

With the expression “cultural industry,” the authors indicate the process of commodification and homologation of the whole spiritual life, which dominate Western society. The cultural industry is considered the culmination of liberalism. According to Horkheimer and Adorno, all that we are used to considering “cultural” is “trash” intentionally produced (Horkheimer and Adorno [1947] 2002, 115). Everything that presents itself to our eyes is trash: Cinema, music, literature, radio, jazz, magazines. The world is nauseating, and technological progress has worsened our lives. The authors even condemn the switch from telephone to radio, with its hideous popular programs designed to gratify a mass democratic audience. Technical rationality has an inherently evil and overwhelming logic, which must be rejected and fought. Horkheimer and Adorno use highly suggestive prose to win the reader’s heart. The pages flow in the continuous condemnation of Western civilization, considered a mass civilization, brutalized and stultified by the capital. The man of Horkheimer and Adorno is controlled within a manipulation-need circle. A monstrous entity, which the authors call the “system,” moves these puppets populating the bourgeois society.

Today’s civilization makes all its products similar. The film, the radio, and the magazines constitute a system. Each sector is harmonized internally, and all are harmonized with each other. Technical rationality today is the rationality of domination itself. Men are estranged from themselves. Cars, bombs, and films hold

everything together to feed the unjust system they serve. However, individuals are unaware of their unhappiness because the system stuns them with fun. The cultural industry is the entertainment industry, which represses and suffocates all forms of freedom. When we think we are happy, Horkheimer and Adorno assure us, we are unhappy; when we think we are rich, we are poor; when we think we are self-realized, we have failed; and so on, in a radical catastrophism, where everyone is unknowingly desperate: "Amusement itself becomes an ideal, taking the place of the higher values it eradicates from the masses by repeating them in an even more stereotyped form than the advertising slogans paid for by private interests" (Horkheimer and Adorno [1947] 2002, 135).

Adorno and *The Authoritarian Personality*

In *The Authoritarian Personality* published in 1950, Adorno and his collaborators, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel Levinson, and Nevitt Sanford, study the origin of prejudice and discrimination through a series of research conducted between 1944 and 1949 at the University of California at Berkeley (Adorno et al. [1950] 1964). The book, one of the most important social psychology studies on anti-Semitism, places the personality in relation to the social structure and describes a new anthropological species, the authoritarian type, one who reconciles the ideas of a highly industrialized society with a form of instinctive and irrational thinking. Those with the most ingrained prejudices mostly come from authoritarian families, whose parents have repressed their critical abilities since childhood. Adorno and his collaborators elaborate an ethnic prejudice scale based on the scores attributed to the subjects they interviewed.

In the chapter written by Else Frenkel-Brunswik, the subjects, affected by prejudices to conventionality and submission to members of the internal group, show a tendency toward the idealization of parents, of which they glorify the physical appearance and the external conduct, rather than the internal dimension of their personality. On the other hand, subjects not affected by prejudices demonstrate that they can evaluate parents more critically and objectively. The researchers report the responses of some subjects who fall into the high variant of the scale (subjects with many prejudices). The question is phrased like this: "What kind of person is your father/mother?"

One woman, with a high score, describes her mother as an "extraordinary woman and a truly beautiful woman." Adorno notes how the interviewee focuses on her mother's outward traits, emphasizing that she is beautiful, never gets sick, and can do many things. To the same question, another high-scoring woman replies that her father is a "wonderful man" who couldn't be better, with a young, attractive face and dark green eyes. This woman also proves to have a stereotypical conception of parents. When asked to talk about her mother, she repeats the first two sentences dedicated to her father and then continues praising her mother's beautiful outward appearance. These responses are typical of high-scoring subjects.

Subjects on the lower variant of the ethnic prejudice scale describe parents as real people with qualities and defects. Their descriptions focus mainly on the internal characteristics rather than on the external ones and the physical aspect. Paradoxically, it is the subjects with the lowest scores on the ethnic prejudice scale who have the closest and most affectionate relationship with their parents.

Frenkel-Brunswik finds a close correlation between the glorification of parents and the attitude of submission to their authority and values. In these cases, respect is based on fear of father and mother. For the purposes of the genesis and preservation of prejudices, Frenkel-Brunswik attaches the utmost importance to the fact that some individuals have grown up with authoritarian parents and therefore have not developed an adequate capacity for critical judgment. Having a dominating father or mother predisposes children to uncritical submission to authority and identification with those who inflict the sanction: Pain that produces pleasure rather than affliction. Submission to authority has broad implications for behavior toward those who exercise power and toward those who do not. In these subjects, submission to the strong is often accompanied by overpowering the weak.

According to Adorno, submission to parental authority can be closely related to submission to authority in general. And submission to authority has, in turn, the broadest implications for social and personal behavior toward both those in power and those without it. Many high-scoring subjects with cold, aloof, rigid, and authoritarian parents often agree with administering severe punishment. They identify with the person who punishes them and even enjoy the punishment.

Adorno identifies two opposing attitudes: Submission versus independence in relation to parental, typical of individuals with few prejudices (Adorno et al. 1964, vol. I, 206). The authors consider the fascist personality to be a “disease” and write that the fascist individual if he/she were freed from his/her pathological ideology would feel better as a body healed of a disease can feel better. Adorno wonders how to “cure” the fascist personality. In the conclusions of this vast work, which deserves to be read in its entirety, the researchers answer that fascist structure can only be defeated by radically changing the total organization of society. Individual therapy alone is not enough.

In their conclusions, the researchers write that individuals adhere to fascism because they are continuously molded from above for the over-all economic pattern to be maintained.

However, the idea that fascism was imposed on the Germans and Italians from above, so dear to the authors, has been denied by leading historians. Thanks also to the work of Renzo De Felice; today we know that the power of those dictatorships did not rest only on the threat of using force against dissidents or manipulation. Hitler and Mussolini enjoyed broad consensus among the people and the *élites*, as has already emerged from the Pareto correspondence. Even the horror of the Holocaust benefited Hitler’s Willing Executioners, as documented by Daniel Goldhagen in his book on the consent of ordinary Germans toward the Nazi extermination of Jews. The idea that the Germans were forced to be Nazis is psychologically reassuring for Adorno, who, despite being a critical theorist, shares the psychological tendency typical of the common man. I am talking about the

psychological tendency to label the behaviors we do not like as crazy, imposed from above, or the result of brainwashing (Hoffman 2006, 37; Sageman 2008, 50) mainly applied in speeches about terrorists after the 9/11 attacks (Krueger 2007).

The typical individual of the Frankfurt School is the furthest away from the Weberian individual. It is shaped, irrational, unaware, and moved from above. Pay attention to the words with which Adorno explains the adhesion of individuals to fascism on the final page of *The Authoritarian Personality*: “It is safe to assume, however, that fascism is imposed on the people, that it actually goes against their basic interests, [...]. It is precisely the fact that the potentially fascist model is to a large extent imposed on the people that allows for some hope for the future” (Adorno et al. 1964, vol. II, 976).

Fromm and the Value of Disobedience

While the critical reason of Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse is destructive, that of Fromm is much more constructive.

Fromm writes that, although the importance of Marx is much greater than that of Freud, it is necessary to merge the main aspects of their thinking to acquire a more profound knowledge of the forces that move the world (Fromm 1970, 110). Fromm would like to free men from alienation and egoism and base it on love and altruism.

This humanistic project is impeded by capitalist society.

To hope for a radical change, men must first learn the value of disobedience. The Jewish and Hellenic myths teach that the history of man began with an act of disobedience. Adam and Eve steal the apple from the forbidden tree, while Prometheus steals the fire. Without those crimes, human history would not exist. Men evolve through acts of disobedience. Humanity has grown spiritually and intellectually thanks to the moral strength of those men who said “no” to higher commands. Fromm realizes that he is on slippery ground and states that not all acts of disobedience are lawful, useful, and just. Fromm knows well that the precept of disobedience, embraced without distinction, would make any coexistence impossible. Even neo-fascist militants in Western democracies can be labeled as “disobedient.” Fromm believes that laudable disobedience opposes mass society’s conformism and capitalism’s logic, which promotes egoism. Disobedience gave rise to humanity and is the means that could save it. We have been educated to believe that the “good” soldier is the one who obeys the superiors. Still, the survival of mankind is entrusted to the soldier who will refuse to press the button to drop the atomic bomb. The essay on disobedience is dominated by the fear that a nuclear war will erase all traces of life on Earth within five or ten years. Learning to disobey is vital, but not easy, because society is organized to instill obedience in all its members from an early age. Socialization agencies agree on celebrating obedience:

For centuries kings, priests, feudal lords, industrial bosses and parents have insisted that obedience is a virtue and that disobedience is a vice. In order to introduce another point of view, let us set against this position the following statement: *human history began with an act of disobedience, and it is not unlikely that it will be terminated by an act of obedience.* (Fromm 1963, 97)

Freedom and the ability to disobey are inseparable, and it follows that any social, political, and religious system that proclaims freedom but bans disobedience moves men away from freedom itself.

Fromm points to the three pillars that underpin his critical theory, to each of which he attributes a maxim.

The first pillar is the critical mode, the maxim of which is: “De omnibus dubitandum est.” Fromm invites us to cultivate doubt. What we think of ourselves and others is pure illusion. Men must learn to be cautious, skeptical, distrustful of ideologies, ideas, and ideals, which shield the economic and social interests of the ruling class. What lies in our mind is nothing more than a reflection of the interests of capitalism. The critical attitude is present in Marx, but also in Freud, whose psychoanalytic method is based on the capacity to doubt. This is the intellectual mood that characterized the philosophers of the Enlightenment and the scientists. Marx thinks that the economic structure is the fundamental dimension of reality, while Freud believes it is the individual’s libido. However, both are wary of rationalizations, ideologies, and clichés, which dominate people’s minds. Men live on illusions. They wake up from their sleep.

The second pillar is the force of truth, the maxim of which is: “The truth will set you free.” For Marx, truth brings about social change; for Freud, it produces individual change. In both cases, the aim is to reach awareness to free oneself from social conditioning. Marx and Freud wanted to awaken men and free them from the bonds of illusions.

The third pillar is humanism, whose maxim is: “Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto” (Terentius), which finds expression in the ideal of universal man advocated by the Renaissance. Since every man represents humanity, nothing human is alien to him. Every man should identify with the suffering of others and strive to improve the world (Fromm 2010).

Once they have learned the value of disobedience, men will finally be able to consciously place themselves before the alternative between to have and to be, which is the title of a book by Fromm published in 1976.

The mode of having and being are two potentialities rooted in human nature. The biological drive for survival tends to promote the attitude of possessing commodities and material wealth.

Still, individuals who seek security in possession are insecure because they depend on what they have: Money, prestige, and their ego. They depend on something outside of them that they can easily lose. The awareness of the precariousness of their most precious assets causes anguish and suffering. Whatever men have can be lost, which is especially true for property, as well as for social position and friends, not to mention that at any moment, men can—and sooner or later they have to—lose their life (Fromm 1976, 77).

In *The Revolution of Hope, Toward a Humanized Technology* (1968), Fromm writes that alienated men, concerned only with having, do not really live. This obsession with possession also manifests itself in language. Common men usually say they have insomnia instead of they cannot sleep; they have a happy marriage instead of loving their wives. The modern man has everything, a car, a house, a job,

children, a marriage, problems, and satisfactions (Fromm 1968, 87). People, whose main energy in life is directed toward having, suffer. How can we solve this identity crisis to transform the alienated man into a living man?

Fromm invites men not to let themselves be guided by the conformism of the mass and to ask themselves: “Who am I?”

The alienated man is also central in *Escape from Freedom* published in 1941, in which Fromm explains that modern men are convinced that they decide and want what they want, but this is one of the great illusions they have about themselves. Many of the decisions men make are not really theirs but are suggested to them from the outside. Fromm studies the human basis of Nazism and explains the rise of fascist totalitarianism with man’s difficulty in accepting the weight of freedom. In contradiction with his conception of the individual directed from the outside, Fromm affirms that Nazism did not come to power by depriving men of freedom; the men voluntarily chose to get rid of their freedom. The turning point did not happen from above but from below.

Why?

Human nature can tolerate physical loneliness but not moral loneliness. The monk locked up in the cell believes in God, and the political prisoner who has remained in spiritual communion with fellow fighters is not morally alone. The need to avoid moral loneliness is one of human nature’s fixed and immutable factors. The *Escape from Freedom* hypothesis develops around a passage contained in Balzac’s novel, *The Inventor’s Suffering*, which Fromm quotes at the beginning: “Man has a horror for aloneness. And of all kinds of aloneness, moral aloneness is the most terrible” (Fromm 1965, 35).

If men gain ever greater freedom by distancing themselves from other men—we read in *Escape from Freedom*—they will end up feeling morally alone. They will try to escape their unbearable situation by destroying their freedom. Rather than living in moral solitude, men prefer to submit to an absolute power, which makes them feel integrated into a large community. The average man needs to identify him/herself with a large group. However hostile he/she may be to the principles of Nazism, the vast majority of German citizens, forced to choose between being alone and feeling that they belong to Germany, will choose the latter path.

These psychological conditions did not cause Nazism, but they gave the average man those certainties he/she was in great need. Fromm is critical of the freedom developed by capitalist society, which distances individuals from their fellow men in the name of profit. Fromm’s alternative is utopian. Man has no alternative before him than to join the world in the spontaneity of love and productive activity.

Foucault and the Invisible Power

As we have seen, Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse conceive power as an omnipresent force. They commonly refer to power as a ruthless and ferocious entity with no name or face. In some cases, this approach has produced very fruitful results in the history of sociology, as we will see shortly, giving the floor to Michel Foucault

and Pierre Bourdieu. In other cases, however, it has been used to make rhetoric against capitalism and Western society.

One of the problems posed by the conception of power as an evil and faceless force is the following: If sociology is not able to indicate what power is, and who holds it, it becomes very difficult to help alienated men to break the chains of illusion.

Where to start to improve society?

The chapter on the cultural industry by Horkheimer and Adorno overflows with phrases in which power is described as an invisible monster. Another example is on a page where Fromm writes that no one wants a Third World War. Still, some terrible hidden forces are pushing humanity toward this tragic outcome. The Frankfurt School teaches us that the bourgeoisie and capitalists hold power. Still, we cannot fail to notice that the bourgeois are billions and, among them, many revolutionaries, such as Marx and Lenin. Among the capitalists, there is also Engels.

Furthermore, we now know that there are different types of capitalism and capitalists. Rhenish capitalism, practiced in Germany and Northern Europe, with variations in Japan, differs from neo-American capitalism (Albert 1993).

Perhaps the hidden power responsible for our ignorance and perdition is represented by capitalist companies. Still, even in this case, we cannot but ask which companies we are talking about: Large multinationals or even family-run capitalist firms? The typical response of critical theorists is that these distinctions are idle. All capitalisms and all firms, large or small, are part of a single perverse system. But this answer is equivalent to describing a Hegelian “night in which all cows are black” and, therefore, is equivalent to not answering our objection: What is power, and who holds it?

However, as I have anticipated, the conception of power as a secret force has also produced research that has become classic. One of the most illustrious examples is Michel Foucault (1926–1984), author, among others, of *History of Madness* (Foucault 2006), *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault [1975] 1979), and *The History of Sexuality* (Foucault 1978).

To summarize Foucault’s position on power most directly and effectively, I will benefit from the information technology available today to historians of sociological thought, as I did with Luhmann. Thanks to the American online video sharing and social media platforms like YouTube, I report the words he addressed to Noam Chomsky in a public debate in 1971 titled “Debate Noam Chomsky & Michel Foucault—On human nature.”

To Chomsky, who had proposed anarcho-syndicalism as an ideal society, which would free men from the oppression of power, Foucault replies that there is a dark and evil power, which, if not first hunted down and fought, is destined to reproduce itself even in the society longed for by Chomsky. European societies have the custom of thinking that power is localized in the hands of the government and exercised through a certain number of particular institutions, such as the administration, the police, or the army. One knows that these institutions are made to transmit and apply orders and to punish those who do not obey them. Foucault believes that political power is exercised further through the mediation of several institutions, which seem

to have nothing in common with political power that looks as if they have nothing in common with political power, as if they are independent of it, but in fact are not. University and, more generally, all teaching systems that appear to disseminate knowledge are made to maintain a certain social class in power and exclude the instruments of power of another social class.

Another example is psychiatry, which apparently is also destined for the good of humanity and for the knowledge of psychiatrists. Psychiatry is, in reality, another way to bring to bear the political power over a social class. Justice is yet another example. It seems to Foucault that the political task for critical thinkers in Western society is to criticize the workings of institutions, especially those that appear to be neutral and independent, and to attack them in such a way that the political violence, which has always exercised itself obscurely through them, will finally be unmasked so that one can fight against them. It is atmospheric to hear the loud voice of Foucault say that if we seek to advance a formula for the future society without having thoroughly criticized relations between the different forms of political violence that exercise their power within our society, we run the risk of letting them be reproduced even in the noble and apparently pure forms, such as anarcho-syndicalism.

Herbert Marcuse

The idea of power as an elusive force, which takes possession of the endo-psychic structure of ordinary men, reaches its climax with Marcuse, who brings us back to the first generation of the Frankfurt School after a brief interruption dedicated to Foucault and Mills.

Marcuse's book *One-Dimensional Man* captivated many activists of the 1968 movement, who saw in Marcuse a master of a new anti-bourgeois, anti-capitalist left. Marcuse welcomes his readers with this value judgment: "This society is irrational as a whole" (Marcuse 1964, IX).

To a preponderant extent, *One-Dimensional Man* is a continuation of the chapter on the cultural industry by Horkheimer and Adorno, both in style and in content. For Marcuse, all that exists is unhappiness, ignorance, pathology, immorality, manipulation, and inhumanity. *One-Dimensional Man* is a radical critique of Western civilization, conceived as a new form of totalitarianism based on technology and well-being, which have transformed liberty into a mighty instrument of domination. Marcuse calls this system of domination in two ways: "technological society" and "advanced industrial society."

The idea that the United States and the Soviet Union are two different societies is rejected by Marcuse, who sees the same totalitarian tendencies in both. The thesis is typical of the Frankfurt School. The more workers, once exploited and harassed, lead a comfortable life and can enjoy paid holidays and entertainment, the more unhappy and desperate they are, without their being aware of it. "The result then is euphoria in unhappiness" (Marcuse 1964, 5).

The ideological purpose of *One-Dimensional Man* is evident. By saying that more freedom equals more dictatorship and wealth implicates more unhappiness,

Marcuse can avoid confronting the fact that Western society has developed in a direction other than that indicated by Marx. Even if the catastrophe announced by Marx did not occur, we still live in a catastrophic situation due to capitalism. In liberal societies, technology and raising the standard of living are used instead of Terror (with a capital “T”) to keep the centrifugal social forces at bay, namely the dissent toward the capitalist system. Technology and well-being, Marcuse assures, are the pillars of the totalitarianism of liberal societies: “By virtue of the way it has organized its technological base, contemporary industrial society tends to be totalitarian. For ‘totalitarian’ is not only a terroristic political coordination of society, but also a non-terroristic economic-technical coordination which operates through the manipulation of needs by vested interests. It thus precludes the emergence of an effective opposition against the whole” (Marcuse 1964, 3).

According to Marcuse, even pluralism of parties, freedom of the press, freedom of speech, free elections, and the balance of powers can create a totalitarian system.

Marcuse transforms the merits of free societies into demerits and their progress into setbacks. The denial of freedom, and even the possibility of freedom, is matched by granting freedoms designed to strengthen repression (Marcuse 1964, 244). According to Marcuse’s line of reasoning, every European citizen should be saddened instead of rejoicing in the growth of their civil, political, and social rights because being freer means being more oppressed: Marcuse’s thesis is so paradoxical as to be irrefutable.

The Marcusean equation of liberalism and totalitarianism would have become increasingly difficult to sustain with the evolution of historical studies on the re-education of dissident intellectuals and political opponents in totalitarian regimes. I have addressed this issue elsewhere in detail (Orsini 2011, 231). Here I limit myself to recalling the autobiographical book of the journalist Jean Pasqualini, *Prisoner of Mao* (Pasqualini 1976), published in 1973, nine years after the first edition of Marcuse’s *One-Dimensional Man*.

Pasqualini, a recluse from 1957 to 1964 in inhuman conditions, left us this portrait of communist totalitarianism in his book about his time in the Chinese camps. Pasqualini recounts that he and the other prisoners ate everything, even the most repugnant things: Rotten vegetables, rats’ winter stores, bones dug up in the fields, and worms in the mouths of cattle. They fought with the pigs if by chance they saw something edible in their feed. They had fallen even lower than the animals. And it was all deliberate; it was part of the “reform”—Pasqualini concludes—that strips people of the only thing remaining to them: Their dignity (Pasqualini 1976, 46, 242; Kotek and Rigoulot 2001, 468).

One-Dimensional Man exemplifies the radical catastrophism of the first generation of the Frankfurt School. Marcuse expresses well the conception of power as a faceless and nameless force. Culture, politics, and economy unite to forge an omnipresent system destroying any real form of culture, politics, and economy. In the advanced industrial society, the productive apparatus tends to become totalitarian to the extent that it determines not only the occupations, skills, and socially required attitudes but also individual needs and aspirations.

This is Marcuse's curse against the technological society. A condemnation of technology that Habermas will reject, as we will see shortly.

In Marcuse's own words:

In the face of the totalitarian features of this society, the traditional notion of the "neutrality" of technology can no longer be maintained. Technology as such cannot be isolated from the use to which it is put; the technological society is a system of domination which operates already in the concept and construction of techniques. [...] As a technological universe, advanced industrial society is a political universe, the latest stage in the realization of a specific historical project—namely, the experience, transformation, and organization of nature as the mere stuff of domination. (Marcuse 1964, XVI)

Dahrendorf and the Regulated Conflict

Dahrendorf is famous for arguing that class must be defined by power and not private property and for documenting that Marx's predictions of capitalism have not come true. Marx had foreseen that the proletariat and the bourgeoisie would compact themselves, creating two homogeneous blocs involved in a frontal and irreducible conflict. In his *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society* (1957), Dahrendorf discovers the opposite phenomenon. The capitalists and the proletarians have divided internally, and social conflicts have become less destructive. The result is that the proletarian revolution in Europe and the United States did not happen.

Dahrendorf's work is littered with phrases that glorify the conflict as a positive fact. I select the most significant for their anthological value: "Conflict is an essential element of the structure of every society. It grows out of this structure and can be eliminated only very temporarily, and only by structural changes" (Dahrendorf 1959, 114). "Societies are essentially historical creatures, and, because they are, they require the motive force of conflict—or, conversely, because there is conflict, there is historical change and development. [...] Conflict is a stubborn fact of social life. [...] Social conflict is ubiquitous; in fact, this is one of the premises of our analysis. [...] Not only in social life, but wherever there is life, there is conflict" (Dahrendorf 1959, 208).

But be careful: The conflict celebrated by Dahrendorf is the "regulated conflict" (Dahrendorf 1959, 209), which characterizes liberal societies. For Gramsci and Lukács, good conflicts are those that destroy liberal society. On the contrary, Dahrendorf names "good conflict" the one that strengthens the liberal order.

Conflict is also good within the psychic system. All the best qualities of a man, a group, or a society are a consequence of conflict.

This passage can be defined as Dahrendorf's eulogy of liberal conflict:

All that is creativity, innovation, and development in the life of the individual, his group, and his society is due, to no small extent, to the operation of conflicts between group and group, individual and individual, emotion and emotion within one individual. This fundamental fact alone seems to me to justify the value judgment that conflict is essentially "good" and "desirable." (Dahrendorf 1959, 208)

For Dahrendorf, the conflict arises from the struggle for power, unleashed by the scarcity of resources. Being subject to power is always an afflictive experience. Man prefers to command rather than obey. It follows that everyone would like to acquire the power to strike with sanctions rather than be hit. On the other hand, men have no alternatives to being in a prominent or subordinate position since society is governed by coercion. There is always someone who commands and someone who obeys for structural reasons. It is the structure of industrial society, with its intricate system of roles, that is coercive. The role and the social position, not the individual personality, play a fundamental role in understanding the conflict. Roles, like social positions, are conceivable, in principle, without referring to personal individuals (Dahrendorf 1968, 36).

For Parsons, power performs a useful function for the whole system, being the means whereby the political subsystem pursues collective goals. In addition, Dahrendorf conceives of power as a zero-sum game, which does not benefit the whole of society, but only the minorities who hold it, except in very few cases, such as the defense of the population from a foreign invasion. Since resources are scarce, no power group can govern in the interest of all. Some social groups are sacrificed and others benefit.

On this point, Dahrendorf agrees with the Marxists.

The disagreement is about the future of capitalism. In Marx's model, after capitalist society, there is the communist society; in Dahrendorf's model, there is the post-capitalist society. For Marx, the most important phenomenon of our time is capitalist society; for Dahrendorf, it is the industrial society.

This point is fundamental and requires clarification.

Industrial society and capitalist society, in Dahrendorf, are two different terms, which express different concepts. Capitalist society is a particular species of industrial society. Capitalism constitutes only one of the various forms of industrial society. Industrial society is a historically more important phenomenon than capitalist society and is destined for a longer life since industrial production will always be present in some way in our lives, notwithstanding that its forms may change. For Dahrendorf, the characteristic element of industrial society is the mechanized production of goods in industrial plants and enterprises.

We are ready to enter the heart of *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society*, which is divided into two parts.

The first is the *pars destruens*, in which Dahrendorf demolishes the crucial aspects of Marx's theory of class conflict.

The second is the *pars construens*, in which Dahrendorf builds his theory of class conflict.

Since *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society* is a very dense text, I will anticipate the concepts that support the work. The book's first part is based on three concepts: Decomposition of capital, decomposition of labor, and control over the means of production. With these three concepts, Dahrendorf surpasses Marx.

The second part is based on the concepts of quasi-group, interest group, and conflict group, on which Dahrendorf builds his counter-theory of political conflict. Let us immediately specify that, in the Dahrendorf lexicon, class is synonymous with an interest group. The class, in Dahrendorf, does not have the meaning it has in Marx.

Box 10.3: Dahrendorf's Antinazism

As a student, Dahrendorf (1929–2009) opposed Nazism and was sent by the Gestapo to a concentration camp in Poland in 1944. After the war, he promoted human rights and opposed all dictatorships. He was first a member of the German Federal Parliament, the Bundestag, and then the European Commissioner for Education in 1970. He was the Director of the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) from 1974 to 1984, when he returned to Germany as a Professor of Sociology at the University of Constance. Neil J. Smelser wrote that Dahrendorf bridged the gap between social theory and political practice better than anyone (Grimes 2009).

Decomposition of Capital and Decomposition of Labor

Let's start with the concepts of the decomposition of capital and the decomposition of labor.

Dahrendorf wonders what happened to capitalism after Marx's death, and he answers that the structure of industrial societies has changed profoundly. While in Marx's capitalist society, managers and owners tended to coincide, in post-capitalist society, the ownership of a large firm can be in the hands of many anonymous stockholders with no management functions. The ruling class, instead of compacting itself, has fragmented. Capitalism itself has fragmented, giving rise to a multiplicity of competing groups. The separation between those who own the industry and those who run it as managers has transformed society. Marx had not foreseen the decisive importance that the separation between ownership and control of the means of production would assume. The consequence of this fundamental fact is that the capitalist class prophesied by Marx never took shape. Capital and capitalism have disintegrated. With what consequence? A multiplicity of fragmented groups has appeared on the economic scene. Some groups are supportive, some compete, and some are simply different and have no particular relationship with each other.

The effects of this new situation on the class conflict are threefold.

First, the replacement of capitalists by managers changed the composition of the groups participating in the conflict.

Second, the change in recruitment and composition changed the nature of the issue generating conflicts, since the interests of the functionaries without capital differ from those of full-blown capitalists, and so do the interests of the workers vis-à-vis their new antagonists.

Third, the decomposition of capital caused a change in the forms of conflict. Perhaps this new conflict, in which workers are no longer opposed to a homogeneous capitalist class, cannot still be considered a real class conflict. In any case, it is not the division of the whole society into two large and homogeneous hostile camps predicted by Marx (Dahrendorf 1959, 47).

When did the decomposition of capital begin?

The turning point occurred in the nineteenth century and toward the beginning of the twentieth when the joint-stock company found application in all branches of economic activity. Today, the overwhelming majority of post-capitalist industrial societies are wide joint-stock companies. In addition, cooperatives or state-owned enterprises own an increasingly large part of the national wealth. In short, companies owned and managed by a single individual or by single families have long since ceased to be the prevalent type. The spread of joint-stock companies increasingly separates the ownership of the means of production from their control. Dahrendorf uses a fundamental category of Parsons's functionalism, namely the differentiation of roles caused by the specialization of functions. The transition process from the capitalist enterprise to the joint-stock company is described as a process of differentiation of roles. The roles of owner and manager, which were initially combined in the position of the capitalist, have been split and attributed to two distinct positions: That of the stockholder and that of the executive.

The numerous stockholders, who own the shares, have no decision-making power over the life of their companies. At the same time, the manager without capital directs and commands the company, of which he/she has no ownership rights.

This separation of roles has a profound consequence on the conflict within the company. Having no property rights, the industrial manager must strive to establish good relations with the workers. This effort, which makes use of structures and collaborators, reduces tensions in the workplace. Unlike the pure capitalist, the manager without capital must win the subordinates' consent. In the event of a head-on collision with them, he/she could not resort to the power of whoever owns the company. At the same time, those who own the company cannot easily enjoy the workers' consent because they do not have the qualities and skills of a manager.

At the top of industrial society, there is not a single compact class with identical interests.

And at the base?

The working class has also fragmented over time. The world of work has become increasingly heterogeneous. The current working class is a social stratum characterized by a strong differentiation caused by a great specialization.

The working class specialized and differentiated under the pressure of technological innovations in production processes and the theory of industrial organization developed by Frederick Taylor (Taylor 1919) and Henri Fayol (Fayol 1949).

The process of fragmentation of the world of work experienced a turning point at the beginning of the twentieth century, when a new category of semi-skilled workers came to the fore, followed by the category of highly skilled workers, such as industrial experts. Dahrendorf identifies three types of workers: Highly skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled, who differ in wages, social prestige, and power.

The workers of these three categories are not compact and homogeneous for various reasons. First, they receive different wages. A highly skilled worker's salary and social prestige are very close to white-collar employees. The divisions among the workers are also due to their unequal power distribution. Highly skilled workers enjoy the gratification of giving orders to semi-skilled workers, who, in turn, give orders to unskilled workers. The workers are interested in money and power,

wanting to command one another. The fact that they have different interests puts the workers in conflict. Skilled workers often oppose the wage increases of semi-skilled workers because they do not want to lose superiority over them. Similarly, non-skilled workers look bad at the wage increases of semi-skilled workers because they fear the gap between them will widen. The decomposition of work has changed the problems at the root of the conflict and the forms of conflict.

The New Middle Class

Dahrendorf doubts that we can still speak of a capitalist class and a working class. To understand the class conflict in post-capitalist society, we need to focus on the “new middle class,” a term that Dahrendorf takes from Emil Lederer and Jacob Marschak, who used it in an essay published in 1926 in German (Lederer and Marschak 1995). While the working class fragmented after Marx’s death, the new middle class came to life already broken up and fragmented. Within it, Dahrendorf distinguishes two broad strata: Bureaucrats and white-collar workers.

Bureaucrats, who represent the highest stratum of the new middle class, adhere to the positions of the ruling class because, even when they earn less than the workers, they have more authority than they do. Because they feel being part of the ruling class, bureaucrats tend to behave a certain way in industrial, social, and political conflicts.

White-collar workers represent the lowest stratum of the new middle class and are very close to the working class. From the point of view of class conflict, the conditions of white-collar workers are similar to those of industrial workers. Examples of white-collar workers are salaried employees in the tertiary industries, shops and restaurants, cinemas, and commercial firms, as well as highly skilled workers and foremen who have acquired salaried status. Even though white-collar workers earn little more than workers and have slightly more social prestige, Dahrendorf expects them to behave like workers in class conflict: Radical left parties, he writes, will find precisely in these employees the majority of the consensus.

The fact that the bureaucrats joined the bourgeois class and the white-collar workers joined the proletariat has made the bourgeoisie and the proletariat two classes even more extensive and fragmented than they already were. The class conflict has remained, but its protagonists, forms, and motifs have changed. No two large, homogeneous, and polarized social classes exist today. The Marxian conception of society, so attractive and simple, has become a meaningless theoretic construction.

Social Mobility and Citizenship Rights

Vertical mobility has also strongly pushed the process of class differentiation, causing a series of decisive repercussions on the structure of class conflict. Thanks to social mobility, individuals can climb the heights of society with their talent. The

great turning point is in the power acquired by the education system in attributing social positions.

Social rank, the security of future work, and the possibilities of consumption of an individual find their first and most important factor of progress in the school. In a post-capitalist society, the school plays a fundamental role in selecting the individuals who will occupy the highest positions of the social pyramid. The social position comes to depend more and more on scholastic goals. Increasing class instability decreases the intensity of class conflicts as individuals, instead of advancing their claims as members of compact and homogeneous groups, find it easier and more convenient to compete with each other individually. Even when competition is impossible or does not produce the desired effects, group conflicts tend to assume a less violent and rigid character than Marx's class struggles. Civil wars and revolutions are unlikely in a very mobile society. Post-capitalist society institutionalized social mobility, an extraordinary fact in Marx's time when most individuals were stuck in their social classes. Dahrendorf credits Marx with correctly observing what he had in front of him. His mistake consisted in having absolutized what he saw. He believed that the class conflict of his time would remain fundamentally unchanged, merely taking on a more rigid and extreme form.

The process of class differentiation was also influenced by the growth of civil, political, and social rights adopted by most industrial societies.

The first right consists in the general application of the principle of legal equality. Then came universal suffrage and the right to form political parties, which allowed the transfer of political conflicts from factories to parliaments. Trade union organizations and socialist parties, thanks to freedom of association and political equality, have managed to improve the class position of the workers. Social rights were then introduced, which include the right to retirement, unemployment benefits, health insurance, legal aid, the minimum wage, and the right not to fall below a minimum quality of life threshold. Post-capitalist society allows workers to be paid little, but not so little that they fall into despair.

Marx had not considered that equality is a force with great dynamism. Once men have taken a step forward in the right to equality, they want to reach a new milestone immediately. Marx's prediction, according to which the bourgeois would see their privileges increase while the proletarians would fall lower and lower, did not verify itself. In capitalist societies, a social structure has formed which prevents absolute forms of privilege. It is true that, in Marx's time, the principle that bourgeois and proletarians were equal before the law was only a cynical fiction. Today, however, this is no longer the case. Post-capitalist society extended individual rights and opposed forms of inequality and social differentiation. It is undeniable that striking differences in income and social prestige also exist in post-capitalist society. However, there has been a strong leveling of social differences, thanks to the increase in real wages of workers and the simultaneous taxation of higher earnings, which have allowed for a more equitable income redistribution.

The Institutionalization of the Class Conflict

Another reason why the class conflict did not take the direction proposed by Marx is the institutionalization of class conflict, a concept that Dahrendorf derives from Theodor Geiger, who published two essays about industrial sociology in 1929 and 1930 (Geiger 1969, 1970).

In a post-capitalist industrial society, workers and employers agree on the game's rules and how to fight each other. Not all hits are legitimate. The scene of group conflict has become, instead of a battlefield, a kind of market where relatively autonomous forces fight each other according to certain rules of the game which stipulate that none of the contenders is permanently the winner or the loser.

Dahrendorf, recovering another central idea of functionalism, reproaches Marx for being "naïve" and not understanding that systems always find ways to return to equilibrium after a shock. This was also the case for the structure of industrial society, which benefited from the institutionalization of class conflict. Marx did not understand that every society can cope with any new phenomenon that manifests itself within itself sometimes by simply assuming a position of inertia.

Numerous social bodies have been created in the industry to normalize conflicts, such as trade union negotiations, conciliation, mediation, and arbitration bodies. In the political world, on the other hand, legislative assemblies and courts perform these functions of mediation and moderation. In post-capitalist industrial society, civil wars are possible but less likely since, thanks to reforms, they have become the last and last resort for resolving conflicts.

According to Dahrendorf, Marx correctly saw the destructive and extreme nature of the industrial conflicts of his time. Still, he did not foresee that capitalist society would find the mechanisms to rebalance itself and dilute the violence of the conflicts. According to Marx's logic, a violent conflict can only be resolved by a more violent conflict.

Why was Marx so shortsighted?

Dahrendorf gives a Paretian answer: Marx's view was obfuscated by his passion. He foresaw what he loved and hoped for revolution.

In conclusion, we live in a time characterized by the overcoming of capitalism, but still in an industrial society. Between the industrial society of today and that of a hundred years ago, there are differences and numerous similarities. Machines and factories, workers and entrepreneurs, wages and profits exist today as they did then. The culture of industrial society also survived almost unaltered. The value of equality, success, economic rationality, and profit maximization persist. The fundamental values of the first industrial revolution remained unchanged, including the value of social mobility. Industrial societies, to function, must rely on capable individuals, which inevitably require rewarding individual qualities. A minimum of social mobility is essential in all industrial societies, which also have another characteristic in common: Educational institutions as tools for assigning roles. Dahrendorf, recovering another functionalist idea, quotes Durkheim and invites us to remember that industrial society is also a moral community founded on a system of values.

The unequal distribution of power also remained unchanged in the transition from capitalist to post-capitalist society. In post-capitalist industrial enterprises, there are always those who give orders and those who execute them. It is the same rational-legal authority of which Weber speaks. The social inequality of authority pervades the entire structure of any industrial society. This inequality in power is the cause and content of most conflicts and clashes of interests in post-capitalist society.

After analyzing the *pars destruens* of *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society*, I expose the *pars construens*.

Before proceeding, let us summarize what has been said so far.

The revolution of the proletariat did not occur due to the decomposition of capital, the decomposition of labor, and the formation of the middle class, which was born internally divided. Marx's two homogeneous and opposing blocs were not formed also thanks to the institutionalization of the conflict, social mobility, the role of the educational system as a social elevator, the growth of rights, the more equitable distribution of wealth, and the wage increase.

Latent Interests and Manifest Interests

In the *pars costruens*, Dahrendorf distinguishes between latent and manifest interests.

Latent interests are predetermined interests that do not depend on individual will.

Manifest interests are psychological realities of which the individual is well aware. The fundamental point is that latent interests are "non-existent" in a psychological sense, while manifest interests are realities in the minds of those who occupy positions of domination or subordination in associations.

The relationship between latent and manifest interests is very close: When the former becomes deliberate purposes, they are transformed into manifest interests. To say that a person has an overt interest is to say that that person wants and desires a certain goal. A person with a manifest interest becomes passionate. Manifest interests are also the agenda of organized groups. These psychological elements correspond to what in Marxist literature is called "class consciousness." To be clear, one can think of latent and manifest interests as Marx's class in itself and class for itself.

Dahrendorf's first thesis is that latent and manifest interests, by connecting with each other, cause the formation of classes.

Let's see how.

Quasi-Groups, Interest Groups, and Conflict Groups

The great protagonist of Dahrendorf's theory is the conflict group. Despite thoroughly examining his book, Dahrendorf does not provide a clear distinction between interest groups and conflict groups: Two terms he seems to use with the same meaning. The impression is that the conflict group is the most advanced point of the interest group, which takes part in the most intense battle to conquer scarce resources.

This lack of conceptual clarity is surprising in Dahrendorf, who is always very precise in defining his concepts. Dahrendorf does not specify the difference between interest group and conflict group, even in the dictionary of his terms, where he includes thirty-three to help the reader better orientate between the dense pages of his work (Dahrendorf 1959, 237–240).

Let's consider the conflict group as the most aggressive part of the interest group and ask ourselves: How is it formed? The formation of an interest group depends on the structural conditions of organization.

First, a quasi-group must exist, that is, an aggregate of individuals with identical role interests. The quasi-group, a concept that Dahrendorf takes up from Morris Ginsberg (Ginsberg 1934), is not a real group, but a pure and simple potential group. Its members share certain latent interests on the basis of which they could form an organized group at any time. Quasi-groups are camps for group recruitment. It is therefore not logically correct to speak of "members" with reference to quasi-groups. The interest group arises when the members of a quasi-group acquire an awareness of their common interests and establish an association coordinated by authority relations.

In Dahrendorf's lexicon, "association" is a broad concept that indicates the coordination of a group of individuals organized into roles based on dominance and subordination. In other words, where one group can target another group with sanctions based on a system of roles endowed with legitimate power, there is an association. A chess club is also an association when there is a group that rules over the members within it. Authority is understood by Dahrendorf as a "zero-sum" game made up of shares. If the share in power of group A increases, the share in power of the opposing group B decreases. Authority has a "dichotomous" nature and is a universal element of the structure, even more general than property and status.

Interest groups are the actual agents of group conflicts. They have a structure, an organization, a program, a goal, and some members. A political party or trade union is an example of an interest group. Chess clubs, professional associations, or football teams also fall into this very general category.

The prerequisites for the formation of an interest group are called "empirical conditions of organization," which are of three types: Technical, political, and social.

Technical conditions of organization of interest groups include a statute, a staff, certain rules, a set of material means, a certain number of regular activities, an objective function, a founder, and an ideology.

Political conditions of organization require a system of laws that make possible the plurality of political parties and the freedom of association. The possibility of having a political organization is a prerequisite for the formation of conflict groups.

Social conditions of organization include communication and structural recruitment.

As for communication, a geographically scattered quasi-group cannot develop communication between its potential members. However, Dahrendorf believes that the ruling classes and the oppressed classes have today the same possibilities of organization since industrial societies have dropped the barrier of communication,

which was the main obstacle to the organization of subordinate groups in pre-industrial societies.

As for structural recruitment, an interest group cannot be born if its members are recruited at random. Recruiting criminals, unfortunates, people without any personal talent, but also individuals with physical or mental disorders, does not allow for adequate recruitment.

In addition to the technical, political, and social conditions, the formation of interest groups also presupposes certain psychological conditions, such as identifying oneself with the expectations relating to the roles of authority. Conflict groups are psychological phenomena.

Dahrendorf does not conceive of society as a large mass subdued by an organized minority. Dahrendorf society is made up of a multiplicity of associations, each of which is characterized by the existence of a dominant group. There are as many dominant groups as there are associations, that is, economic enterprises, political parties, etc. Members of a subordinate group in a given association are often members of a dominant group in another association. Dominant groups are nothing but dominant groups within certain associations. Theoretically, there can be as many competing, conflicting, or coexisting dominant conflict groups in society as there are associations.

Intensity and Violence of Social Conflicts

Let us now turn to the intensity of the conflicts. Why are some conflicts more violent than others?

Intensity depends on the energies and level of participation that the warring parties invest in the conflict. Suppose an individual participates in a conflict with all his/her vigor. In that case, the conflict will be intense because individuals participate in it with all aspects of their personality. If those who fight on the opposite side are in the same condition, the conflict will be very severe. Dahrendorf cites the difference between the conflict of those who struggle to gain power in a chess club to change its regulations and those who struggle to oust the leaders of an industrial company to change its command structure. It is clear that the stakes are different, and so is the level of existential involvement. A particular conflict is very intense when the cost of victory and defeat is high for both parties involved.

While intensity refers to the causes of the conflict, violence refers to its manifestation and depends on the type of weapons used. Weapons can range from words to guns. There is a scale of the degree of violence. Violence is strongly discouraged by effective conflict regulation. Conflict regulation, which concerns the manifestation of the conflict and not its causes, is effective when three factors are present.

The first factor is mutual recognition. Both opponents must recognize that they are in a conflict situation, legitimizing each other as bearers of a just cause. There can be no regulation if an opponent denies that the other side has the right to assert its arguments or deny that they are realistic. Resorting to ideologies denying the existence of a conflict increases the violence with which the conflict manifests itself.

The second factor is the existence of interest groups. Until manifest interests are expressed through an organization, individuals are nothing more than widespread aggregates, unable to talk to each other, understand each other, and coordinate to find a meeting point. If interest groups are institutionalized, the violence of the conflict will be more moderate.

The third factor is the agreement on the “rules of the game.” If the parties to the conflict accept a series of rules on how to hit each other, the violence will be more contained. The rules of the game ensure the survival of both interest groups, preventing the unleashing of a fight with no holds barred. The rules of the game make antagonists’ behaviors predictable, and their blows are never fatal.

Dahrendorf indicates conciliation, mediation, and arbitration among the forms of conflict regulation. When conciliation, mediation, and arbitration are normal facts of the daily life of a society, violence is very limited, and the conflicts between the groups are smoothed out. The conflict thus becomes one of the institutions of society. It is not true, Dahrendorf writes, that societies necessarily need a revolution to evolve.

Dahrendorf rejects the expression “conflict resolution” because the conflict is “universal” and it can only be regulated, never “resolved” in the sense of eliminated.

Dahrendorf also rejects the expression “suppression of social conflict” because social conflicts can never be suppressed in the long run. History of the twentieth century has shown that not even totalitarian regimes can suppress opposition in the state and industry for too long periods. The complete repression of the opposition by totalitarianism leads to popular uprisings, as the case of the anti-Soviet uprising in Hungary in 1956 demonstrates. Suppose totalitarian regimes want to repress the opposition and avoid revolts. In that case, they must continually pay attention to the discontent in society and develop a plan to satisfy certain interests so they do not explode. But this way of acting is only a partial repression of conflicts, a temporary and not definitive remedy. In Dahrendorf’s realism, power is unavoidable, and conflicts are always lurking.

At this point, Dahrendorf proposes an empirical generalization: If conflict groups are allowed and can organize themselves, the most uncontrollable and violent form of conflict is excluded, namely guerrilla warfare. Reciprocal recognition makes the most violent manifestations of conflict superfluous and, therefore, unlikely.

This generalization, however, has been partially disproved by the history of terrorism, which developed after the publication of *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society* (1957). The Italian Red Brigades, to cite just one example, were born in 1970 in Italy, where conflict groups were allowed and could organize themselves. Similar considerations can be made for the Rote Armee Fraktion, also known as the Red Army Faction, a sister terrorist formation of the Red Brigades, which was long-lived, having operated in Germany from 1970 to 1998 (Moghadam 2012).

Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society also presents other empirical generalizations, which we must analyze.

The Pluralism-Superimposition Scale

According to Dahrendorf, the greater the number of social groups an individual belongs to, the less likely that individual is to mobilize to defend their class interests intensely.

To better express this proposition, Dahrendorf constructs a scale with two extremes: The pluralism of conflicts and the superimposition of conflicts. A lot of pluralism means moderate conflicts; a lot of superimposition means extreme conflicts since pluralism tends to cause the dissociation of conflicts, while superimposition pushes toward their connection. To clarify how pluralism causes the dissociation of class conflict, Dahrendorf cites three examples: The Church, the state, and industry.

The situation in which a man is a dignitary of the Church, an industrial manager, and a citizen of the state, or perhaps a worker in an industry, a member of the Church, and a citizen of the state is pluralistic. The situation in which an individual has interests within the state, the Church, and industry is also pluralistic. In this case, the members of the conflict groups of different associations coincide, and it is very difficult for them to want to unleash destructive conflicts with each of them. By destroying one of them, they would damage some of their interests. This means that pluralism tends to reduce the intensity and violence of social conflicts. Dahrendorf finds a negative correlation between the degree of pluralism in a given society and the violence of conflicts.

Even the fact that an individual can move from one social class to another, improving or worsening his/her power position, reduces the likelihood that he/she will mobilize too intensely in favor of his/her class. Dahrendorf focuses on the psychological condition of those who see the possibility of becoming part of the ruling class for themselves or their children. Why should he/she lash out with all his/her might against a group that will probably welcome him/her as a member in a position of power? Why would he/she have to sacrifice all of him/herself to defend a group that he/she soon risks leaving?

On the other hand, conflicts are connected and superimposed when the people who fight each other in the Church are the same ones who also fight each other in the industry and the state.

To simplify his thinking, Dahrendorf imagines a country characterized by three main macro-conflicts around power in the industry, the state, and the relationship between the town and the country. If Protestants and Catholics have the same political weight in the state and industry, and if they inhabit towns and countries in the same proportions, then we have a pluralism of groups and dissociation of conflicts.

If, on the other hand, the Protestants live in the town and the Catholics in the country, and if the Protestants occupy the roles of government in the state and in the industry, where Catholics are always in a subordinate position, then we have superimposition of groups and connection of conflicts.

What exactly does that mean?

It means the same people meet in different contexts but in identical conflict relations. Grievance, rage, and resentment of those who are always subjugated increase more and more.

Dahrendorf finds a close positive correlation between the degree of superimposition of conflicts and their intensity. If a large number of individuals are subordinate in the church, state, and industry, and identify with the conflict groups that challenge authority in each of these associations, then all of society will tend to divide into two opposing camps, according to the typical Marx scheme. Suppose the individual subordinate to power in a certain association will find some gratification in a different association. In that case, he/she will have a subordinate role, on the one hand, and a superordinate role, on the other.

To conclude, Marx's catastrophic prediction did not occur because, in post-capitalist industrial societies, the social conflict has become pluralistic and dissociated.

Dahrendorf and Functionalism

We have seen how often Dahrendorf has used concepts and theories of functionalism. This is unsurprising as Dahrendorf believes society is "Janus-headed" (Dahrendorf 1959, 159). Parsons caught one face and Marx the other. Therefore, the theory of society as integration and the theory of society as coercion have equal dignity and importance. According to Dahrendorf, the sociologist must choose between the two approaches because integrating them and examining them in depth would be impossible. Dahrendorf wonders whether it is possible to construct a sociological theory that holds both sides of society together, and his answer appears to be decidedly negative. It would be too complex and perhaps contradictory an operation. The criterion is practical and not ideological. Neither of the two approaches is superior nor better than the other. I share this aspect of Dahrendorf's thinking, which I have tried to affirm in the chapters on Durkheim and Parsons. It is entirely ideological to say that one sociologist is better than another because he/she has studied conflict instead of social integration. This distinction may make sense to a party militant, not a scholar. The difference between scholars is in the depth and originality of their thinking.

Scholars must choose one of the two approaches without delegitimizing those who choose the opposite perspective since both are necessary. Dahrendorf's model holds that any social structure has a coercive nature, and authority relations generate role conflicts of interest. Under certain conditions, these conflicts lead to the formation of antagonistic organized groups, both in particular organizations and in society as a whole.

As happens in Parsons's system, and also in Dahrendorf's the concept of role plays a decisive role. The problem is not the individuals with their personalities but their roles. The first task of a sociologist is to identify the roles of authority. All subsequent steps will depend on investigating the distribution of power and authority.

Coser and the Functions of Social Conflict

One of the most-cited and appreciated theorists by Dahrendorf is Lewis A. Coser: author of a fundamental work *The Functions of Social Conflict* (1956) that enhances and enriches Simmel's central thesis that conflict is a form of socialization.

Coser's book is organized with admirable simplicity. Each chapter of the book opens with one of many of Simmel's sociological reflections on conflict, for a total of sixteen reflections, which Coser then discusses, expands, and sometimes corrects in the light of research published after Simmel's death. Coser's chapters have such an orderly and precise development to give a false impression that Simmel was a systematic thinker. In the following pages, I will follow the same method as Coser, reporting my synthesis of the sixteen propositions contained in his book. Coser writes that his book could not have been written without Robert K. Merton's teaching, criticism, and advice. In a nutshell, Coser's book is a functionalist study of conflict. Like Dahrendorf, Coser connects functionalist theory and conflict theory.

Proposition 1: Conflict Serves as a Connective Function for the Group

More often than not, conflict unites the group rather than disrupts it, as confrontation forces its members to interact closely and intensely. With this first thesis, Simmel draws attention to the integrative power of antagonism, which performs two fundamental functions.

The first function is that the conflict delimits the boundaries between groups, helping to strengthen their identity within the system. It is a group-binding function of conflict.

The second is that the repulsion between the parties to conflict creates a balance between them, preserving the system's stability.

Proposition 2: Conflict Serves as a Safety-valve for the Group

The fact that a group member is hostile toward another member is not a purely negative social factor for the cohesion of the group. Oppression, Simmel writes, worsens when it becomes daily torture suffered without ever reacting. If men did not have the opportunity to rebel against the rudeness of their colleagues or the tyranny of their superiors, the risk of extreme acts would increase. The fact that the conflict occurs periodically between two or more group members prevents anger from suddenly exploding in extreme forms, which can destroy the union or weaken it through the walking out of some members. Institutions are important safety-valves when they discipline the expression of antagonistic claims.

Proposition 3: Realistic Conflict and Nonrealistic Conflict

Conflict can be a means to an end or an end in itself.

Conflicts can be avoided or diluted when they are a means toward a specific result since alternative means can reach the same goal. In this case, we will say that conflict is only one of the functional alternatives available. When, on the other hand, the conflict is an end in itself, the situation becomes complicated since the conflict serves to vent a hostile feeling, which can only be appeased with the destruction of

the hated person. In these cases, man has no purpose to achieve; he/she needs to vent his/her feelings and aggressiveness. We will say, then, that the conflict is an end in itself and does not contain elements of self-limitation. Conflicts of the first kind are realistic.

On the contrary, conflicts of the second kind are unrealistic. Realistic conflicts allow participants to calculate the fight's costs to remove the problem's cause. On the other hand, nonrealistic conflicts are not aimed at solving a particular problem but at relieving aggressive tension. Among the nonrealistic conflicts, Coser cites anti-Semitism, except anti-Semitism caused by conflicts of interest and values between Jews and other groups. Coser seems to argue that there is also anti-Semitism, which is not born of hatred against what Jews are as a religious community but against what Jews do as a group of interest.

Proposition 4: Conflict and Hostile Impulses

Simmel argues that hostile impulses cannot, in themselves, be enough to trigger a conflict. Interaction is essential. Conflictive behavior always arises on social grounds. From a sociological point of view, the properties of individuals must be placed within an interaction system. Psychic motivations are not sufficient to explain the arising of conflicts between individuals and groups. Hate and love need an object and always develop in a relationship. For example, conflicts of interest, which fall into the category of realistic conflicts, can develop even without feelings of personal hatred between the warring parties. Coser cites workers opposing company executives to obtain economic concessions. It is not uncommon to see union representatives chatting amicably with management leaders. On a personal level, they are friends, even if, on a professional level, they find themselves involved in a momentary conflict due to their respective social roles.

Simmel also notes that hating the opponent can sometimes be useful, as is evident in wars. Coser, who continues to enrich Simmel's reflections with his comments, compares the armies of mercenaries with citizen-soldier armies. The former, unlike the latter, are not emotionally involved in the struggle. When a rational conflict becomes very hard, it can be useful to resort to the feeling of hatred to increase the morale and determination of those who fight.

Proposition 5: Hostility in Close Social Relationships

According to Simmel, hatred and love are co-present in all social relationships in which the individual is absorbed with his entire personality. Simmel brings to mind Freud's concept of "ambivalence" or the addressing of antithetical feelings (of affection and hostility) toward the same person (Freud 1938, 370; 1948, 54–55). While professional relationships, such as those between workers and managers, can arouse conflicts without triggering hatred, intimate relationships are often characterized by the alternation of hatred and love or their coexistence. According to Simmel, this happens because intimate relationships, which require spending much time together in the most disparate, easy and difficult, sad and joyful situations, multiply the occasions of in-group conflict. The greater the frequency of interactions, the greater the opportunities for hostile interactions. While common sense

tends to see in the primary group, such as the family, the place in which to find protection from the surrounding world, Simmel points out precisely in the primary groups the main seat of the most debilitating conflicts: "Intensity of the conflict is related to closeness of the relationship" (Coser [1956] 1964, 65).

Furthermore, the likelihood of a sudden explosion of conflicts in primary groups is particularly high since, unlike in secondary groups, hostile feelings are often repressed, accumulating without relief-valves for fear of compromising a relationship. This involves the emotional life fully and completely. Coser notes that ambivalence can be tempered in primary groups through the institutionalization of so-called joking relationships, including ironic jokes that stigmatize the irritating behavior of certain family members.

Proposition 6: The Intensity of the Conflict Is Strictly Proportional to the Closeness of the Relationship

The starting point is always the contrast between groups that involve the personality integrally and groups that involve it partially. It is reasonable to expect that conflicts will be less intense in groups such as the Rotary Club or Chambers of Commerce, characterized by emotionally neutral relationships than in religious sects or fundamentalist political parties, such as the Communist Party. The possibility of a very intense explosion explains the repressive nature of these organizations. To prevent emotional power from turning into hatred, participants must learn to restrain themselves, while the group must repress the outbursts of their members. The emotional charge that the integral group employs to repress the apostate, the traitor, the internal enemy, the renegade, the heretic, can even be higher than that used against external enemies. While rival groups endanger the boundaries of the group, the apostate endangers its very foundations. Coser distinguishes the hatred aroused by the apostate from that aroused by the heretic on the basis of the type of damage they cause to the fusional group. The apostate is the one who abandons the group to go over to the enemy. The heretic, on the other hand, claims to believe in the values of the group, but disagrees on the means to reach the goal and on the interpretation of the doctrine.

The apostate, or renegade, commits a series of crimes against his/her group. First, it strengthens the rival group's belief that it is right by increasing its strength. Furthermore, by joining the rival group, the apostate increases his energy and enthusiasm. It is, in fact, typical of the apostate to exhibit a greater fanaticism than all the members of the new group to which he/she has moved. Knowing that he/she cannot go back, the renegade assures absolute fidelity to his/her new associates, who were once his/her enemies, and fights the values of his/her spiritual past with absolute vehemence. In doing so, he/she appears, in the eyes of his/her original group, as the most dangerous of all his/her enemies.

The heretic imposes different problems on the total group. In the first place, as I have already mentioned, he/she creates internal divisions to create a personal following, unlike the apostate, who abandons the group, rather than splitting it. Furthermore, even when expelled, the heretic continues to seek proselytes from the original group, unlike the apostate, who fights against his/her former comrades.

Coser enriches Simmel's sociological reflection with two examples: Stalin's fury against Trotsky, who was considered more dangerous than General Andrej Vlassov, who, after distinguishing himself for his tenacity in fighting the Nazis, defected in 1942 and began collaborating with Hitler, and Lenin's hatred reserved for the "renegade" Kautsky greater than his hatred toward any capitalist (Lenin 1970). Conflict is more intense and radical when it springs from a close relationship. The coexistence of union and opposition within these relationships makes the conflict particularly bitter: "In conflicts within a close group, one side hates the other more intensely the more it is felt to be a threat to the unity and the identity of the group" (Coser [1956] 1964, 71).

Proposition 7: Function and Impact of the Conflict on Group Structures

Simmel teaches that conflict can play a positive function for group cohesion. Still, Coser is also interested in knowing the cases in which conflict plays a destructive function with respect to the reasons for being together.

What are the fractures due to?

According to Coser, Simmel was unable to distinguish conflicts that endanger the group's life from those of secondary importance. Thus, for example, it is reasonable to expect that the conflict between two spouses over the conception of a child will be more serious than a conflict over the organization of holidays since the refusal to have children calls into question a fundamental function of marriage: Procreation. Drawing inspiration from a passage by José Ortega y Gasset on civil discord in ancient Rome (Ortega y Gasset 1946, 15), Coser distinguishes the conflicts that concern the very basis of a relationship and those that concern fewer central issues. In addition to identifying these two types of conflicts, Coser specifies that further effort is needed to specify the conditions that favor the emergence of one or the other. Which social systems favor primary conflicts, and which others favor secondary conflicts?

According to Coser, extreme conflicts are rare in modern societies thanks to the division of labor, which imposes interdependence between social groups and exerts pressure against the violent disintegration of the system. The fact that the groups are interdependent means that they have common interests, and common interests are an excellent basis on which to build bonds and solidarity. Leaning on the studies of Edward Alsworth Ross (Ross 1920, 164–165), Coser speculates that one of the reasons for the lack of class struggles in the United States on a large scale is precisely in the fact that workers join a multiplicity of ethnic, religious, social, and political associations simultaneously, preventing the creation of two opposed blocs fighting an irreducible war on the basis of a single identity or interest, linked to the type of work. The relative stability of the class structure of American society can be explained by the numerous intersecting lines between different groups, identities, values, and interests, which cancel each other out in the event of a conflict, creating a beneficial balance for the preservation of the system. As we know, Dahrendorf re-proposed this sociological reflection of Coser.

Having reached this point, Coser compares the totalitarian societies of his time, which he calls "rigid and inelastic systems," with pluralistic societies or open

societies, which he calls “flexible systems,” applying to them the same reasoning already developed on close relationships. Totalitarian societies, wanting to impose total participation in collective life on the individual, act like fusional groups. Despite the attempt to divert hostility toward an external enemy through anti-Semitism or xenophobia, rigid systems repress opportunities for conflict, allowing hostility to build up and explode.

Pluralistic societies, on the other hand, do not repress conflict; on the contrary, they are held together by conflicts, which, however, are multiple, multiform, and intersected, and this is why they do not completely involve the personality of the individual. This idea of Coser, too, was absorbed by Dahrendorf.

Coser adds another valuable sociological reflection.

It is not true that conflicts between members of a given society always perform a positive function for its cohesion. This rule applies to conflicts over secondary issues but does not apply to conflicts over vital issues. It may happen that the repression of a conflict group, which threatens the principles at the foundation of civil life, is the only solution to restore the balance of the system. Coser does not mention the case of far-left terrorism, but it comes to my mind immediately. Far-left terrorists aspire to overthrow existing society through disproportionate revolutionary violence, which rarely allows for compromises.

Proposition 8: Conflict as an Index of Stability of Relationships

This thesis, like the previous one, analyzes the relationship between the conflict and the structure of the group, considering the relationship’s stability.

The fact that there is no manifest conflict in a group does not necessarily mean it is devoid of hostility or antagonism among its members. Simmel invites us to investigate below the surface. Group members are more likely to repress their feelings of hostility if they are aware of the weakness of their bond, which they are afraid of breaking. On the other hand, when participants feel very strong bonds tie them together, they feel freer to express their discontent, which means that the absence of conflicts in a relationship cannot be considered an index of stability. In intimate relationships, deep conflicts can be inferred from the lack of conflicts on the surface. Coser uses these sociological reflections by Simmel to criticize the common thinking about marriages, according to which a couple who never quarrel is very close.

In contrast, a quarrelsome couple is very fragile. Spouses who quarrel often have a very strong bond; for this reason, they feel free to vent their discontent because they know the strength of the bond that unites them. Furthermore, contentious spouses are also less prone to ambivalent feelings.

Moving from primary to secondary groups, Coser applies the same reasoning to minority groups who are victims of racism by majority groups. If discriminated minorities express hostility toward their detractors, they are likely to be quite integrated into society. If, on the other hand, they passively suffer injustices, they are likely to lack the confidence to protest. In this case, they will tend to slide toward ambivalence, alternating feelings of admiration and deference with feelings of hatred and repulsion toward the majority group. In confirmation of his hypothesis, Coser cites the research of Samuel A. Stouffer, according to which the black

soldiers of the American army most willing to volunteer on dangerous missions during World War II were also those most committed to racism (Stouffer et al. 1950, vol. I, 526).

Proposition 9: Conflict with External Groups Increases the Group's Internal Cohesion

This thesis analyzes the impact of war with an external group on the structure of the internal group. As we have seen, the group, struggling with external groups, delimits its borders. Simmel contributes two more ideas to this concept. The first is that the war with external groups strengthens internal cohesion, and the second is that it pushes for the centralization of powers.

Coser reproaches Simmel for failing to distinguish adequately between violent and non-violent conflicts. Simmel made the mistake of believing that conflict always leads to the centralization of powers in the group, but Coser objects that this is not the case. In highly differentiated groups, all conflicts, violent or non-violent, produce a centralization of powers to prevent the group from dispersing under the action of centrifugal forces.

The question is more complex in poorly differentiated groups, such as religious or political sects.

The bloodless conflict with the outside world does not produce the centralization of powers in the sect. Its members are so compact and exalted that they do not need a higher authority to push them to engage in the struggle. The situation changes, however, if the sect engages in a conflict with bloodshed. In this case, centralized control is inevitable as modern warfare techniques impose a certain degree of division of labor on all groups. In summary, to know whether the conflict will increase internal centralization, two fundamental variables must be considered: The type of conflict, which can be violent or non-violent, and the type of group, which can be small and compact or large and disunited.

Coser reproaches Simmel for a second error: Having theorized that despotism, understood as absolute and irresponsible power, comes in the wake of war. It is not so. The fundamental variable for understanding the birth of despotism, Coser objects, is not war but the internal cohesion of the society involved in the struggle. If society is cohesive, it can easily embark on a war without the need for a despotic power that will compact it. Indeed, the war will strengthen its values.

On the other hand, if that same society is divided and fragmented, the probability that despotism will assert itself to face the military enemy increases considerably. In confirmation of his thesis, Coser cites the authoritarian regimes of modern Europe, which established themselves in societies already largely collapsed within them. Despotism seems to vary in inverse proportion to internal cohesion.

Proposition 10: Conflict with Another Group Defines Group Structure and Consequent Reaction to Internal Conflict

We saw that a war with an external enemy strengthens the group's cohesion, but it can also happen that the war triggers a series of conflicts among its members. How groups handle internal discord in times of war depends on the characteristics of their

structure. According to Simmel, large organizations such as the Catholic Church or large political parties tend to adopt a flexible model, running the risk of dissolving the demarcation of borders, which exposes them to the risk of dissolution in the external environment. Smaller groups, on the other hand, such as sects or minor organizations, tend to adopt a more rigid model, which however risks creating internal ruptures and splits. In summary, Simmel attaches the utmost importance to the size of the group.

Coser objects that there are small groups without strong bonds within them. In this regard, he cites the example of the Chamber of Commerce of a small town, in which relations between members can be detached like those of a large city. Coser invites us to distinguish two aspects of the group's structure: The numerical dimension and the degree of emotional involvement of its members.

While these two variables tend to vary simultaneously, there are some important exceptions. A small political sect of professional revolutionaries plotting to overthrow the government has a structure requiring it to be very intolerant of dissidence. In this case, the group is small and engaged in a struggle that exposes its members to the risk of being killed or arrested. The dissident is considered a mortal danger that must be crushed.

Unlike the heretic, who aspires to found his own following by revisiting the original doctrine, and the renegade, who surrenders him/herself to the enemy, the dissident presents an unparalleled ambiguity, which can be more easily fought by cultivating ideological purity, another typical feature of political sects. The dissident claims to belong to the group but disagrees with some comrades, or perhaps with the leaders, on some particular points, for example, a certain method of struggle. In doing so, he/she attacks the unanimity of the group on which the most fanatic sects are based. A small group, risking their lives in the struggle, sees the dissident as a potential traitor who could act against the community suddenly and in unpredictable ways. Coser, studying the clash between Mensheviks and Bolsheviks on party organization, also invites us to reflect on how the type of conflict pushes groups to assume one type of organization rather than another in an attempt to find the internal structure more functional to the external struggle.

In the end, the variables taken into consideration by Coser are not two, but three: (1) The numerical dimension of the group; (2) the degree of involvement of its members; and (3) the situational aspect, that is, whether the group is continuously engaged in the struggle or only occasionally and whether the struggle is to the last blood or not.

Proposition 11: The Search for Enemies

Simmel explains that struggle groups can "attract" an external or internal enemy to preserve and increase cohesion. What matters is not the actual existence of the enemy but the functions that the belief in an evil force performs for the group's unity. In some cases, the enemy does not exist at all and is invented since the belief in its existence induces the members to act as if the enemy were real, that is, to act according to a conflicting logic. Referring to the studies of Chester Bernard (Bernard 1950, 91), Coser explains that some organizations disintegrate if they cannot fulfill

their purpose, while others self-destruct by reaching their goal and, therefore, must always strive to find new enemies to fight against. Coser is trying to tell us that struggle groups cannot help but struggle. If the struggle stops, they must give it new life.

The problem of the search for the enemy is also organizational and not just ideological. A struggle group has a staff designed to fight and its own internal organization is designed for the fight. With the enemy failing, the group living in conflict and persecution would not know how to reorganize the division of labor, what tasks to entrust to its fighters, and what to do with the accumulated war resources.

Clash-seeking struggle groups can employ two effective strategies.

The first is to exaggerate an existing danger, and the second is to provoke a social group devoid of hostile intentions, transforming its defensive reaction into an offensive move. The search for an external enemy, or the magnification of an existing enemy, preserves the internal structure of the struggle group and raises its morale, especially if its energies are weakening or new dissidents are organizing. The search for the external enemy can go hand in hand with the search for an internal enemy, to whom the defeats are to be blamed. Struggle groups always need to blame someone for their setbacks. Recognizing the opponent's strength would mean recognizing one's own weakness. The identification of a dissident, the internal traitor, lends itself perfectly to the purpose. The scapegoat mechanism allows the group not to recognize their mistakes in the struggle.

So far, we've talked about real enemies. In the first case, as we have seen, some groups, which were not enemies, really become enemies, falling into the trap of the strategic provocation of the group; in the second case, the group has an enemy, which, however, magnifies. Alongside the real enemies, Coser also considers the phenomenon of the invention of the enemy. This is the case with anti-Semitism. Many Jews, at peace with all, have been hated as absolute enemies. In summary, the enemy can be magnified, aroused through provocation, or invented from scratch.

Proposition 12: Ideology and Conflict

Simmel distinguishes two types of conflicts based on the object of contention, which can be personal and subjective or objective and impersonal.

According to Simmel, the objectification of conflict is made possible above all by ideologies and has two fundamental consequences.

The first is to make the fight more intense. Whoever fights for an abstract cause and not a personal interest acts in the name of an ideology, which can be the ideology that exalts the group, justice, people, nation, race, and so on.

The second consequence is to create a unifying element between the contenders, who decide, by mutual agreement, to refrain from personal attacks. Personalizing the conflict around an ideal cause would "dirty" the ideal contest. That is why the fighters agree to ban personal attacks, even though they confront each other harshly. Simmel cites the example of the scientific controversy between two scholars, divided on ideas but united in mutual respect and the super-individual purpose of the search for truth. In summary, the objectification of the conflict affects the intensity of the struggle and the relationship between the fighters.

According to Coser, Simmel is wrong in believing that a conflict for a subjective and personal interest is always less respectable than a conflict for an objective and impersonal interest. Whether a personal conflict is noble or ignoble depends on the values of the community to which the fighter belongs. Wanting to cite an example, which is found neither in Simmel nor in Coser, we can think of the respectability enjoyed by the man who lays his wife's betrayal in the blood in communities that applaud the killing of an adulteress.

However, Coser shares Simmel's idea that those who fight in "good conscience," in the belief that they are acting in the name of "just" values, are particularly ruthless. From this point of view, ideologies, which are normative conceptions of the world, play a very important role as they prescribe the criteria for dividing the world into "good" and "bad." Inner conviction influences the bitterness of the conflict. Coser cites the example of American entrepreneurs, who, over the years, have lost the determination with which they once defended the principle of maximum profit. After many workers' struggles and various other upheavals, the principle of maximum profit at all costs has lost much of its nobility.

Consequently, the number of entrepreneurs who feel they are fighting in good conscience has decreased. The individual, who struggles as a community representative, witnesses a transformation of his/her inner world. The idea of sacrificing him/herself for his/her community gives him/her absolute psychic power and inner strength. The individual required to operate as a representative of the group believes that he/she embodies the aims and power of the group. He identifies him/herself with the group, making the latter a part of him/herself, incorporating it into him/herself, and thus enriching and magnifying him/herself. His energies are thus strengthened, and the commitment with which he/she faces the fight is also strengthened due to the feeling of strength that derives from the strength he/she attributes to the community.

This passage by Coser, about the individual who is expected to act as a representative of his/her group, deserves careful reading for its relevance and depth.

He not only identifies the group with himself, but he also identifies himself more and more fully with the group, abandoning any personal claim for attachment to the cause of the group. As Kurt Lewin observed, sacrificing oneself for an organization increases the bond of loyalty that binds us to it. The member who for the sake of the group renounces his personal interest to some extent has the feeling that he has invested a part of himself in the group; he has projected his own personality onto the group in whole or in part. Through the assumption of the aims and strength of the group, and through the projection of one's self into the group, the latter becomes nothing more than an extension of his personality. In these conditions, the threats directed against the group are directed directly against each of its members. (Coser [1956] 1964, 114)

It is important to note that Coser places this inner transformation in relation to the social role. The role of representative, which the individual receives from the organization, transforms him/her into a hero willing to sacrifice him/herself for the collective cause. Not surprisingly, Coser observes, Marx urged the proletarians not to personalize the conflict with the capitalists. By leading them to believe they were

the bearers of a universal mission, he/she hoped to increase their resolve in the struggle. Coser adds an observation on the role of intellectuals in the objectification of the conflict, which brings to mind what we have already said with reference to Gramsci. It is mainly up to intellectuals to transform interest groups into ideological movements. When intellectuals can transform conflicts of interest into conflicts of ideas, they ennoble the struggle, giving it respectability for lack of personal interest, which increases the conviction of the combatants to act in good conscience.

As for this reflection on intellectuals, Coser claims to be indebted to Robert Michels, Karl Mannheim, and Max Weber.

Proposition 13: Conflict Binds Antagonists

Simmel makes two remarks. The first is that conflict can bind two parties, which had no previous relationship. The second is that the antagonists can enter into a series of agreements on the means by which to hit each other, with the purpose of regulating the conflict. Simmel is well aware that war can lead to the destruction of the enemy. However, he wants to draw attention to the fact that, in many cases, the war, after the initial contact, lays the foundations for further forms of interaction, from which mutual knowledge can develop, which sometimes evolves toward friendship. In other words, conflict can have a socializing effect between antagonists.

Coser enriches this analysis of Simmel with a brief review of the war literature and notes how important it is for armies to establish rules to be respected in combat. The existence of a regulatory infrastructure does the maximum damage in terms of human life that each party could suffer predictable and, therefore, approximately calculable. The development of military techniques requires the continuous renewal of the rules among the fighters. Coser mentions the use of gas, bacteriological warfare, and aerial bombing, making one last very important reflection: Conflict can be very beneficial for society when it adapts the social system to a situation that has now changed. But be careful: Conflict can only be beneficial in flexible systems, which allow the manifestation and organization of dissent. In rigid systems, on the other hand, it is more likely that there will be a tragic and sudden break. It is of the utmost importance that conflict allows adaptation to new conditions. Conflicting behavior can lead to the modification of norms in a flexible society.

On the contrary, rigid systems do not allow the expression of conflicts. In doing so, they prevent adaptations, maximizing the danger of catastrophic breakdowns. As is evident, Dahrendorf included these ideas in his *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society*.

Proposition 14: Interest in the Unity of the Enemy

Simmel grasps a paradox.

A group with a defined structure may wish for a fragmented rival to achieve better organization and centralization. Since the union increases the opponent's strength, we should expect the more organized group to hope its enemies remain scattered and disunited. But let's try to imagine an army grappling with a myriad of gangs that use guerrillas or a union of workers who cannot sit at the negotiating table with the employer counterpart because it is made up of scattered small

entrepreneurs. In these cases, it is better for the organized group A that the rival and disorganized group B unite and elect their leaders, with whom they can negotiate or agree on compliance with certain fundamental rules. Furthermore, establishing a dialogue on how to conduct the conflict will help the more institutionalized group direct the rival group toward a type of combat that better suits its internal structure.

Coser believes these Simmel's theses need to be broadened, also considering the objective of the more organized group and the particular phase in which the struggle finds itself. If the most organized group is an army led by a general who has to invade a country, he certainly won't be interested in witnessing the union of enemies. Perhaps such an interest can mature after the invasion when the victorious general needs a counterpart with whom to agree on the formation of a new government, but not during the amphibious landing. Similarly, a confederation of businessmen will have no interest in seeing the workers' front compacting into a well-disciplined structure as the struggle rages. In the two cases mentioned, the strategy of "divide and rule" tends to prevail and not the one that favors the union of the antagonists.

Coser believes that Simmel's thesis applies only in cases where the warring parties, the organized one and the more dispersed one, have equivalent forces. Likewise, totalitarian regimes need internal opponents to remain divided to subdue them more easily. Totalitarianism needs atomization and not the unification of internal resistance. Simmel's observations do not seem applicable even to conflicts in which the enemies are only helpless victims: The dominant group has no interest in compacting a very weak social category, unable to react in any way to the blows it suffers. However, Simmel's thesis applies well to pluralistic societies, where the stronger group may be interested in the weaker group moving on a terrain of struggle that respects democratic rules. In sum, the validity of Simmel's remark about the interest in the enemy's unity depends on the dominant group's circumstances and objectives.

Proposition 15: Conflict Establishes and Maintains the Balance of Power

In the previous proposition, we saw how important the balance of power is to understand whether the unification or fragmentation of the enemy is convenient for the stronger group. How can we correctly evaluate the balance of power, which forms the basis of peace?

Simmel raises another paradox. The most effective dissuasion from conflict is knowledge of the opponent's balance of power. No group would attack their enemies, knowing they have inferior forces. The paradox, Coser notes, stems from the fact that the enemy's strength can only be known in conflict.

Coser's objections are two.

The first is that a distinction must be made between conflict and contest. A conflict is a particular form of interaction characterized by the use of force intended as the possibility of influencing the behavior of others to make it conform to one's wishes. In contest, it is relatively easy to determine the winner, who is identified on the basis of criteria decided before the confrontation: The fastest runner, the most effective writer, the best jumper, and so on.

However, it is more difficult to agree on the criteria in conflict.

Hardly ever do groups and individuals want to do what they have to do. Since social groups differ in strength, influence, and wealth, demonstrating strength is the most effective way to support one's claims. For other groups to consider their interests, one must show strength. In conflict, strength constitutes merit in itself. The problem is that, rarely, the strength of a group can be assessed before it is exhibited. While economic strength can be calculated quite easily using money as a measure of value, the assessment of non-economic strength is far more complicated, and this poses a problem for achieving peace between the warring parties. If neither of the two fronts can evaluate the offensive capabilities of the other, the mediator is doomed to fail. Mediation is possible when both sides think they are gaining an advantage by ending hostilities or refusing to enter the conflict. Recalling the studies of Ernest T. Hiller (Hiller 1928, 195; 1933, 324).

Coser concludes that the best way to approach a credible estimate of an opponent's non-economic strength is the "trial by attrition" technique, consisting of small provocations to test the counterpart's ability to react. In short, the evaluation of power relationships, without verification mechanisms, requires a test of strength, making it possible to collect the information necessary to estimate the hypothetical losses and gains.

Even when the antagonistic groups establish an agreement to avoid the struggle, they cannot stop paying attention to the balance of power and how they change over time. Seeing its forces have grown more than its opponent, one of the warring parties will ask to adapt the old agreements to the new situation. In this case, the conflict can play a positive role in maintaining social balance, making it clear that a group's strength has grown and must be given the part it deserves. Conflict, instead of being disruptive and dissociative, can be a means to restore balance and, therefore, to preserve a society by guaranteeing its functionality.

Proposition 16: Conflict Creates Associations and Coalitions

The last proposition deals, again, with the unifying function of the conflict. Simmel explains that conflict can create complicity and bonds between elements without contact but need each other to gain more strength. The example is that of the common enemy, which can act as a unifying element in two ways. The first is to unite previously unknown individuals and groups, giving life to a new associative reality with its organization and ideology. The second is to unite two or more antagonists, who create a momentary and instrumental alliance to face a greater threat. Their contrasts are appeased, for a defined time, by the impulse to self-preservation, which leads to a *mariage de raison*. In short, conflict creates bonds where there were none and, at times, initiates a process of rapprochement between dispersed elements on a very large scale. Conflicts with some give rise to associations with others.

As examples of marriage of convenience, Coser also cites the international coalition born during World War II between countries that had Nazi Germany as their common enemy. After allying themselves against Hitler in the name of self-preservation, the United States and Russia became enemies again as their differences took over with the fall of the common enemy. Momentary allies need to focus on their lowest common denominator. Attempting to use their instrumental alliance

to achieve broader goals would unleash dormant differences, endangering the union. Coser also cites the case of the European communists and socialists in the face of the advance of fascism. Their union could not fail to be short-lived due to their differences.

However, there are also cases in which a coalition, born for an instrumental purpose, sees some elements merge, giving life to a stable and lasting formation. Coser recalls that the word “coalition” stems from the Latin *coalescere*, which means “growing together.”

Charles Wright Mills

Charles Wright Mills (1916–1962) is not an exponent of the Frankfurt School. Made that clear, Mills, like those theorists, conceives of power as coercion and manipulation and attributes much wickedness to capitalism.

In his *The Power Elite*, published in 1956, he gives a face to power and points out where it organizes its plots against human development.

Mills’s thesis is that American society is governed by small corrupt factions, which operate for their own benefit and reproduce themselves through co-optation: “The power elite is composed of men whose positions enable them to transcend the ordinary environments of ordinary men and women; they are in positions to make decisions having major consequences” (Mills 1956, 3–4).

These *élites* have established an alliance to subjugate the masses. The *élite* that governs the social structure are three: The billionaires of the big economic groups, the high military ranks, and the top political leaders. The economic, military, and political *élite* hand down power from father to son and coordinate with each other in order not to lose their privileges. American democracy is hollowed out from within by a fundamentally anti-democratic practice of power conducted by small groups in league with each other against the interests of the majority. As is evident, Mills conceives of society differently from Dahrendorf, who refuses to set the discourse in terms of *élite* on one side and masses on the other. For Mills, the American system of power is such that the apex is much more unified and powerful than its disunited and impotent base. The invisible government has now become perfectly visible. It makes the key decisions of our time, showing the utmost disdain for democratic values.

Mills dedicates a chapter of his book to each of the three *élites* mentioned to give the reader a more precise idea of how they operate and make decisions.

Mills, too, like the Frankfurt School theorists, is dominated by a strong pessimism, which is condensed in the last chapter of his book, in which he describes the higher echelons of American society as completely immoral, corrupt, insulting, cynical, manipulative, dominated by ignorance, dedicated to anti-social Machiavellianism-for-the-little-man, and characterized by a total absence of intelligence (Mills 1956, 345).

The concluding chapter is a moral invective, full of phrases according to which the typical member of today’s high spheres is an intellectual mediocrity. When the

institutions are corrupt, many who live and work in them are necessarily contaminated by them. In the corrupt American system, it doesn't matter what you know but whom you know and so on, in a flood of anathemas.

Faced with such a degenerate situation, anyone who has read Pareto cannot help wondering how it is possible that a society with such a corrupt, foolish, and mediocre ruling class can still exercise today, that is, sixty-seven years after the publication of Mills's book, a world power. According to Pareto's *élite* circulation theory, a ruling class rotting in corruption, such as the one described by Mills, should quickly collapse at the first bump.

Carried away by his invectives, Mills does not realize that he is falling into clear contradictions.

In the first part of the volume, he argues that the power *élite* is in league. In the last chapter, he writes that they are mainly in contrast. In Chap. 1, we read that the leaders of the three groups—the warlords, the great businessmen, and the political leaders—tend to march together to form the *élite* that holds power in America. In Chap. 15, on the contrary, we read that the upper echelons are a complex series of factions that stand among themselves in relationships of various kinds, often antagonistic.

In the last few pages, Mills morally condemns American society because it induces young people, who want to be successful, to get in touch with people who have already been successful and could help them in their careers. In such a world, young people looking for success seek to connect with those on whom their success may depend. Provided with Pareto's realism, I wonder if any society ever existed where young people have not worked in this way to climb the social pyramid and why this way of acting should be considered an exclusive evil of American society. Critical theorists continually target Weber's value freedom sociology. The problem is that once that regulatory break is eliminated, scholars expose themselves to the risk of invective, which is neither a description nor an explanation. In short, the principle of value freedom can certainly be criticized and possibly rejected. Still, without a valid methodological counter-proposal, the boundary between critical theory and demagoguery risks becoming narrow.

In a more moderate form, Mills reiterated that American society is undemocratic, even in his influential *The Sociological Imagination*, published in 1959. The social structure of the United States is not entirely democratic. He takes this statement as a basis for agreement. Mills admits he knows of no society that is entirely democratic. Like Pareto, he thinks that democracy remains an ideal. He wants to say that today's United States is essentially democratic in the form and rhetoric of expectation. It is often non-democratic in substance and practice (Mills 1961, 188).

Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action

Jürgen Habermas can be considered a neo-Marxist, but it has become increasingly difficult to label and identify him with a precise paradigm.

Habermas joined the Institute for Social Research in 1956 as Adorno's research assistant but absorbed many elements of the sociology of Weber, Durkheim, Parsons, Schütz, Husserl, Mead, Austin, and others. However, his main interpreters are convinced that Marxism was by far the most influential current of thought on him (Müller-Doohm 2016). It is worth mentioning that, in 1983, Habermas himself wrote that Marx and Hegel are the philosophers by whom he was most influenced: "Marx, and the tradition that goes back to Marx and Hegel, they have been—and remain to this day—the most important point of reference of my thought because of the richness of their teachings" (Habermas 1994, III). After writing these words, Habermas adds that he wants to keep the tradition of Marxism alive, analyzing current problems through its light, and if this were no longer possible, then that light would go out.

Remaining with the history of Marxism, one of the most singular facts in Habermas's life is that Horkheimer himself, who had written so much in favor of a freer society, wrote a letter to Adorno to remove Habermas from the Institute because he feared that his first important essay—a review of the post-war debate on Marx—could put the Institute in difficulty because of the number of times the word "revolution" appeared. Returning to Frankfurt from the United States, and officially reopened the Institute as its Rector in 1951, Horkheimer thought that the Institute should hide any reference to his revolutionary ideas of the past, due to the anti-communism that had spread to democratic Germany. Horkheimer could not even stand the battles of the young Habermas against the rearmament of Germany and added that if he had the opportunity to influence the students with his confused and flawed philosophy, he could have led the Institute to ruin. For his part, Habermas believed that Horkheimer was a political opportunist. Either way, Adorno defended Habermas who would publish the essay in 1957 in the journal *Philosophische Rundschau*, edited by Hans-Georg Gadamer (Müller-Doohm 2016; Petrucciani 2000, 12).

Habermas's contributions are numerous.

I will deal with his theory of the colonization of the lifeworld, which insists on the conflict between the lifeworld, which resists maintaining its relative autonomy, and the system, which seeks to colonize it. As we will see, the conflict between the system and the lifeworld is between strategic and communicative action. I will rely, above all, on three works by Habermas, published in succession: *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1981), *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (1983), and *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures* (1985). The last two books are a collection of essays. Habermas usefully summarized his thesis on the conflict between system and lifeworld in Chap. 12 of *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, and he also summed up his theory of communicative action in Chap. 4 of *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*.

The Colonization of the Lifeworld

Habermas conceives society as a two-level conceptual structure formed by the system and the lifeworld (Habermas 1987, vol. II, 231). Habermas derives the concept of “system” from Parsons and “lifeworld” from Alfred Schütz, Edmund Husserl, and phenomenological sociology in general.

The system and the lifeworld are characterized by two types of action, which, despite their diversity, are complementary: The system’s strategic or instrumental action and the lifeworld’s communicative action. In archaic societies, the system and the lifeworld maintained a dialectical relationship, conditioning and fecundating each other, while today they are increasingly disjointed, due to a process of separation, which has had an impulse with the passage from the stratified class societies of the European feudalism to the economic class societies of early modernity.

The conflictual scheme of the colonization of the lifeworld is dichotomous. On the one hand, there is the system, governed by strategic action, with which individuals try to advance their selfish interests; on the other hand, there is the lifeworld, governed by communicative action, with which individuals try to reach an understanding to coordinate their action plans in a free and cooperative way. The colonization of the lifeworld is the process by which the main media of the system, money and power, penetrate with their imperatives into the core of the vital world, limiting the freedom of individuals to discuss in depth to reach a consensus on common living and improve their mutual understanding (Habermas 1987, vol. II, 327). With its economical and administrative imperatives, the system cuts off free discussions in the lifeworld and severely limits or coerces them. Examples of system structures are the family, the state, the legal system, and the economy.

Habermas warns the reader that he “uses transcendental arguments” (Habermas 1990, 116).

This abstractness requires me to use an example to clarify Habermas’s thinking, which is not found in his work, but which I hope will help better understand the effects of the colonization of the lifeworld.

Let’s imagine a group of friends, all university professors, who meet to discuss, in a free and open way, the project of founding a free newspaper on international politics, which, in addition to creating new jobs, would enrich the public debate and raise the level of information of citizens on dramatic issues. One of the participants in the discussion tells friends that the law prohibits universities from owning online newspapers and university professors from editing them, as really happens according to Italian laws in force. A law prevents a group of friends from engaging in free discussion to carry out a project that would enrich the lifeworld and the system. Here, the system has colonized the lifeworld, emptying it of its most fruitful contents.

Claims of Validity of the Linguistic Act

Once it is clear that the system coercively intervenes in the free discussion in the lifeworld, we must answer this question: What is free discussion unencumbered by power relations?

Starting from his 1971 preliminary studies in the theory of communicative competence, Habermas developed the concept of “ideal speech situation,” which indicates a condition in which the actors discuss freely away from any external force (Habermas 2001, 97).

In an ideal speech situation, each individual is free to present the evidence he/she deems most appropriate to defend his/her point of view so that the most convincing argument prevails. This means that the better argument does not faithfully reproduce reality but gains the most consensus. The consensus should “rest in the end on the authority of the better argument” and not on a provision of the monetary-bureaucratic system (Habermas 1987, vol. II, 145).

In the lifeworld, the actors should arrive to make their decisions by arguing freely, without any external power interfering in their discussions. The concept of the lifeworld implicates the independence of culture from external constraints: “From the perspective of subjects who are acting communicatively, no alien authority can be hiding behind cultural symbolism” (Habermas 1987, vol. II, 149).

In an ideal speech situation, the participants cooperate to seek the truth through critical discussion, having the same opportunity to intervene without being subjected to any form of manipulation or external pressure. In an ideal discursive condition, the participants are intent on convincing the audience only by the strength of their arguments.

The ideal speech situation is characterized by a series of validity claims, which any sincere and honest individual could not fail to share as criteria to be respected in a discussion. They are, for this reason, universal. With the validity claims, Habermas, an enemy of ethical skepticism, wants to identify the ethical requirements that make it possible to define a discussion free and also wants to clarify that society cannot be reduced to pure power relations. The validity claims can be accepted and shared by men of any society.

The validity claims are claims to appropriateness or comprehensibility, truth, normative rightness, and truthfulness (Habermas 1990, 31; 1984, vol. I, 39).

The claim to appropriateness or comprehensibility: Speakers must use understandable linguistic expressions to ensure mutual understanding. A linguistic expression must be understood identically by two or more subjects capable of language and action.

The claim to normative rightness: The speaker must use a correct or fair expression with respect to a system of norms and values shared by the listener as well.

The claim to truthfulness: The speaker must express his/her real intentions sincerely and truthfully so that the listener can trust him/her.

The claim to truth: The speaker must communicate true content so that the listener can share what is actually communicated to him.

Habermas is interested not only in indicating the conditions for a discussion based on freedom of criticism and expression but also in warning against the trespassing of the system into the lifeworld. He also wants to explain the social order's reproduction through the relationship between individuals and society.

What does it mean?

Social interactions, according to Habermas, are possible thanks to speech acts. If we realize that a speech action is not right, not truthful, or not true, we can criticize or reject it and not follow up on the interaction. Social interaction thus becomes dependent on communicative interaction: No communicative interaction, no social interaction, no reproduction of society. Habermas offers the example of a professor who, during a seminar, addresses the following prayer to a participant: "Please bring me a glass of water" (Habermas 1984, vol. I, 306). The professor, Habermas specifies, is not trying to impose his will: The attitude with which he carries out his speech act is oriented to understanding. To establish a possible agreement, the participant must decide if the professor's expression is right, true, and truthful. The agreement will not be reached if he/she disputes only one of these validity claims.

If the teacher uses an understandable linguistic expression, the participant has three possibilities before him/her:

First, he/she can challenge the normative rightness of the professor's linguistic expression and reproach him for wanting to treat him/her as one of his employees. In this case, he/she states that the professor's expression is not right in that normative context.

Second, he/she can argue that the professor does not really need a glass of water, reproaching him for wanting to put him/her in a bad light in front of the other participants in the seminar. In this case, he states that the professor's linguistic expression is non-truthful.

Third, he/she can argue that the nearest tap is so far away that he/she won't be able to return to the meeting before the end. In this case, he/she states that some conditions for the existence of the linguistic expression are non-true.

The example of the professor who asks for a glass of water applies to all linguistic actions aimed at understanding.

In communicative action, speech actions can always be rejected under each of the three aspects claimed by the speaker: Normative rightness, truthfulness, or truth. Habermas calls "perlocution" any non-confessable or inadmissible speech action. He provides the example of a speaker who strategically tells a story late in the evening to delay a guest's departure or a speaker who proposes a bet of \$3000 to embarrass others (Habermas 1984, vol. I, 294). In brief, the speaker is pursuing perlocutionary aims only when he/she deceives his/her partner concerning the fact that he/she is acting strategically (Habermas 1984, vol. I, 294).

Perlocution is an important concept, and we need to delve into it to understand how the philosopher of language John L. Austin influenced Habermas's theory of communicative action (Privitera 1996, 41–55). It is, in fact, Austin who introduces the concept of perlocution. By touching upon Austin's thought, we will become familiar with one of Habermas's intellectual roots that go far beyond Marxism.

Austin and the Speech Act Theory

Austin (1911–1960) exposed his philosophical insights into ordinary language at Harvard in 1955 contained in his *How to Do Things with Words*, published posthumously in 1962.

According to Austin, philosophers have held, for too long, that the task of statements was to describe the world and that such a description could only be true or false. Austin acknowledges the existence of descriptive statements, which he calls “constative.” However, he notes that many statements do not provide any information about facts or events. Ethical propositions, for example, are designed to arouse emotions, forbid certain behaviors, or influence them. Many statements are neither true nor false and do not describe or report anything. There is a particular sentence in which the act of uttering the sentence constitutes the execution of an action. Austin calls it a “performative sentence,” “performative utterance,” or, for short, “a performative.” Performative sentences don’t just say something: They perform something. The performative sentence is not an account of something; it’s a sentence that does something.

An example of a performative sentence proposed by Austin is: “‘I do’ (take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife),” uttered during a marriage ceremony. The second example is: “I name this ship the Queen Elizabeth,” pronounced when the bottle breaks against the bow. These utterances, which do not describe and ascertain anything, are performative since uttering the sentence constitutes the execution of an action. Saying: “Yes” at the altar is not describing a wedding or recounting it; it is to do it. Another example of a performative sentence is: “I declare war” (Austin 1975, 7). In short, it is not true that saying something means always and only affirming something.

Another difference between constative utterances and performative utterances is that the former can be true or false, while the latter can be happy or felicitous and unhappy. The performative utterances are said to be happy when we happily bring our action to completion and unhappy in the opposite cases. It is an unhappy performative, for example, that an individual baptizes the ship, not having the authority to do so. Austin identifies six types of unhappiness, which I don’t dwell on. Eventually, Austin’s theory of unhappiness comes to the conclusion that it is not possible to distinguish between constative utterances and performative utterances clearly, but I am interested only in that part of Austin’s philosophy of language that allows us to better understand the theory of communicative action of Habermas. I wanted to explain what perlocution is and I have finally come to the point.

Austin distinguishes between locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary speech acts, which correspond to the three dimensions of a sentence or utterance.

By slightly modifying Austin’s examples, we can say that:

A locutionary act is the act of saying something that makes sense: “There is a dangerous bull.”

An illocutionary act is the execution of an act in saying something: “In saying there is a dangerous bull, I was warning him.”

A perlocutionary act is the execution of an act by saying something: “By saying there is a dangerous bull, I persuaded him/her to change direction.”

Let’s summarize.

In saying something, we can perform:

- (a) A locutionary act when we pronounce a sentence that makes sense in a context;
- (b) An illocutionary act when we inform, order, warn, or commit to doing something;
- (c) A perlocutionary act when we convince, persuade, hold back, dissuade, and even when we surprise or deceive.

In the illocutionary act, we say: “In saying that thing, I was warning him/her of the presence of a dangerous bull”; in the interlocutory act, we say: “By saying that thing, I have kept him/her from walking in the direction of the bull.”

The perlocutionary act always includes consequences. When we restrain someone from doing something, informing them of the consequences of their action, we perform a perlocutionary act, which, let’s repeat it, is causing certain effects by saying something (Sbisà 2007).

A perlocutionary act is considered to have been carried out if it achieves a purpose (Searle 1969, 1979).

Whoever says something, Austin writes, produces certain consequential effects on the feelings, thoughts, and actions of the listener, the speaker, or other people and “it may be done with the design, intention, or purpose of producing them” (Austin 1975, 101).

Perlocution actually produces extra-linguistic consequences. To know the outcome of the perlocution, it is necessary to await its effects. Saying “I convince you that” or “I alarm you that” is not a perlocutionary act because the use of the verb “to convince” or “to alarm” is not enough to convince or alarm someone.

Let us now try to distinguish the locutory, illocutionary, and perlocutionary dimensions of the following sentence: “I will return the book” (Outhwaite 2009, 45).

By saying: “I will return the book,” I am making an affirmation of complete meaning (locutory act), a promise (illocutionary act), and I am also trying to achieve the aim of reassuring the suspicious owner of my reliability (perlocutionary act).

According to Habermas, perlocution is a case of strategic action. To act communicatively, we should put it this way: “I see that you are wondering if I will return your book, and I assure you that I will.” In this way, we clarify our purpose and do not use our words strategically, disguising or manipulating the communicative interaction. For Austin, saying is acting, also for Habermas.

Since the utterances, that are dear to Habermas, are above all those we pronounce in the lifeworld, we need to deepen the meaning of the latter concept.

What is the lifeworld?

Lifeworld and Communicative Action

The lifeworld refers to the daily life of individuals and their intersubjective relationships, which are based on a cultural stock of shared knowledge or meanings that the social actors take for granted. Those meanings are taken for granted. Individuals cannot critically evaluate the cultural norms they are immersed in: “This background knowledge remains unproblematic as a whole” (Habermas 1984, vol. I, 100). The lifeworld offers the practical advantage of taking the meanings that emerge during the interaction for granted. Taking for granted fluidifies social life. The lifeworld is the world of the obvious: “The shared lifeworld offers a storehouse of unquestioned cultural givens from which those participating in communication draw agreed-upon patterns of interpretation for use in their interpretive efforts” (Habermas 1990, 135).

The lifeworld, with its traditions, shared values, and the meanings transmitted by previous generations, supports the communicative action and its background. The passages in which Habermas explains what the lifeworld is are numerous. The lifeworld contains “ingrained cultural background assumptions” (Habermas 1990, 135). “The lifeworld offers both an intuitively preunderstood *context* for an action situation and *resources* for the interpretive process in which participants in communication engage as they strive to meet the need for agreement in the action situation” (Habermas 1990, 136). However, the best-known definition of the lifeworld is found in *The Theory of Communicative Action*. From an anthropological point of view, it is important to include it:

The lifeworld is, so to speak, the transcendental site where speaker and hearer meet, where they can reciprocally raise claims that their utterances fit the world (objective, social, or subjective), and where they can criticize and confirm those validity claims, settle their disagreements, and arrive at agreements. (Habermas 1987, vol. II, 126)

According to Habermas, the lifeworld is made up of the following structural components: (a) culture, that is, the cultural tradition, which shapes the interpretative schemes of the actors and their value criteria; (b) the society or, better said, the institutional order of a society. In addition to these interpretative and normative elements, Habermas proposes a third fundamental structure of the lifeworld: The personality structure.

A person who wants to undertake a certain professional activity must acquire the skills and the right motivations to do that type of work. In a capitalist society, anyone who wants to become an entrepreneur must develop the ability to command, organize, and pull the price, as well as the ability to calculate risks and look for new earning opportunities. He/she must also acquire the right motivation to forgo short-term gains in favor of long-term goals. In other words, he/she must assume that disciplined, methodical, and rational way of life on which success in a capitalist society is based (Baxter 1987, 47; 2011, 149–191). All these skills and motivations are part of the personality structure from which the actor draws the resources for

social action. In summary, social action depends on these three structures of the vital world: Culture, society, and person.

To gain a deeper understanding of Habermas's theory, we also need to read his definition of communicative action which actors resort to establishing an interpersonal relationship in search of an agreement on how to coordinate their action plans. Let's repeat it: In communicative action, the individual pursues a purpose by establishing an understanding with the interlocutor in an honest, correct, and sincere way.

The purpose of interpersonal communication is communicative understanding, that is, the achievement of consensus between the actors through mutual understanding, which requires rational ways of arguing. Seducing, fascinating, or deceiving is not acting communicatively, as clearly emerges from the definition of communicative action contained in *The Theory of Communicative Action*:

Finally the concept of communicative action refers to the interaction of at least two subjects capable of speech and action who establish interpersonal relations (whether by verbal or by extra-verbal means). The actors seek to reach an understanding about the action situation and their plans of action in order to coordinate their actions by way of agreement. The central concept of interpretation refers in the first instance to negotiating definitions of the situation which admit of consensus. As we shall see, language is given a prominent place in this model. (Habermas 1984, vol. I, 86)

With the distinction between system and lifeworld, Habermas aims to keep together the theory of action, centered on the actor, and the theory of systems, centered on structures. Habermas, like Parsons, also wants to keep the individual and society, micro and macro, actor and system together. Habermas writes that his theory is based on an "integration of paradigms," responding to his critics (Habermas 1991).

After clarifying the concept of lifeworld, let's explore the concept of system.

System's Strategic Action

The system is the place for strategic or instrumental action, typical of economics and politics. Even in strategic action, the individual pursues a goal but exploits cooperation to advance his/her selfish calculations. In strategic action, individuals cooperate to be successful, that is, to favor their self-centered calculation of utility. The communicative action is aimed at achieving an end through an agreement; the strategic action is aimed at getting the better of the interlocutor with the discussion. Strategic action includes resorting to force and manipulation. The actors, being oriented exclusively toward success, that is, toward the consequences of their actions, try to achieve the aims of their actions by influencing from the outside, by hook or by crook, with threats or enticements. On the contrary, communicative action is oriented toward understanding and cannot impose any agreement on the other party through manipulation. What takes place due to an external influence cannot be considered an agreement. Even attempting to charm or win the admiration of interlocutors is an example of strategic action. If individual A shows off and tries to gain the

admiration of individual B, by using an emphatic and suggestive tone or by resorting to other strategies, then A is not really communicating with B. In a footnote of *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas, resorting to the study of Otfried Höffe (Höffe 1975), indicates the four elements of a strategic game: The players, the rules, the end result or *payoffs*, and the strategies. In communicative action, there are no strategies. The moves are not studied at the table to get the better of the interlocutor (Habermas 1984, vol. I, 419).

After reading the definitions of the lifeworld, communicative action, and strategic action, I will touch upon Habermas's critique of technocratic ideology, which will help us understand his differences with Marcuse regarding the role of science and technology in modern society.

Critique of Technocratic Ideology

Habermas is not against science and technology but against technocratic ideology, that is, the idea that technocrats can govern by virtue of their specialist skills, eliminating any problem related to the ethics of life in the name of economic growth at all costs (Habermas 1970, 80). The problem is now clear: If the power of the technocrats increases, so does the colonization of the lifeworld by the system.

Today's capitalism uses the welfare state and the media to depoliticize the masses, to which it gives economic benefits through the welfare state in exchange for accepting the established order. However, these economic rewards do not eliminate class conflicts lurking in a latent state.

When young people were in turmoil, Habermas thought that the student movement could play a positive role in re-politicizing the public sphere, as long as it did not re-propose the old schemes of Marxism. The protest of the students, he thought, could perhaps have called into question the ethics of competition and performance, weakening the legitimacy foundations of late capitalist society. However, Habermas was severe toward the naivety and inexperience of certain fringes of the student movement, who, confusing dreams with reality, deluded themselves into living in a pre-revolutionary situation, mistaking the occupation of the university classrooms for who knows what triumph in the sight of the conquest of power. A movement is not revolutionary—Habermas argues—by the mere fact of defining itself as such. Habermas held a very free and open debate with the leaders of the student movement and he spared no severe criticism.

On June 9, 1967, Habermas was invited to speak at a conference of the student movement, which was held immediately after the funeral of student Benno Ohnesorg, who was killed on June 2 by a policeman during a demonstration against the visit of the Shah of Persia, Mohammad Reza Palavi, in West Berlin. The killing marked a turning point in the radicalization process of the left-wing student movement in Germany. Habermas condemned the violence of the police, flattering the students, whose leader, Rudi Dutschke, spoke up and feared the possibility of using violence as a strategy of struggle. Habermas was alarmed but did not react. After midnight, in the car to go home, he thought over Dutschke's words and quickly

returned to the student congress to brand them as an example of “left-wing fascism.” He was cheered by some and booed by others (Müller-Doohm 2016). Stefan Müller-Doohm recalled that, in the fury of 1968, Habermas sided with the reformist socialist movements, which set out to change the economic structure of capitalism through the welfare state, and not on the side of the far-left movements. Müller-Doohm also reconstructs Habermas’s public condemnation, both of the violence of the police and of the violence of the left-wing extremists. Habermas’s position, who opposed parliament’s approval of authoritarian laws, appears to have typically been moderate.

Rather than revolution, Habermas thinks of revitalizing democracy, opposing the idea that all social issues can be reduced to technical problems. These ideas are also found in the Preface to *The Theory of Communicative Action*, where Habermas reproaches the neo-conservatives for wanting to keep the capitalist model of economic and social modernization unchanged at any price. The neo-conservatives give absolute priority to economic growth protected by the compromise with the welfare state, without saying that the collateral consequences of this growth are socially disruptive (Habermas 1984, vol. I, XLIII).

Habermas fears technical and economic drifts; he fears that, in advanced capitalism, the system will make decisions removed from free debate, colonizing the lifeworld with the instrumental rationality of strategic action. The lifeworld has its rationality, the communicative rationality, which Habermas defends against all colonizers, including technocrats.

Does this mean that Habermas condemns technology and science, like Marcuse?

Habermas himself clarified the differences between him and his dear friend Marcuse thanks to a 1968 essay he dedicated to him on the occasion of his seventieth birthday titled: “Technology and Science as ‘Ideology’” (Habermas 1970, 81–122).

As we know, for Marx, the development of productive forces has a revolutionary potential. For Marcuse, on the other hand, the productive forces have become an instrument of legitimizing the social order. Capitalist society legitimizes itself precisely through its incessant technological progress. Hence, Marcuse denounced science and technology as instruments of domination, not social liberation. The problem, for Marcuse, is not the use of science and technology by capitalism; but science and technology as such since the rationality of science and technology is, immanently, a rationality of domination. Technological rationality erodes critical rationality. Modern scientific-technical rationality is portrayed as an enemy of freedom.

Habermas opposes this idea. According to him, technical-scientific rationality is not inherently despotic and oppressive. A science qualitatively different from the one we know would not be possible. It is not possible to create two different kinds of science, namely a bourgeois science and a revolutionary science. Science is unique, but the use of science can be different.

According to Habermas, science and technology are rooted in purposive rational action. Habermas does not want to give up the technique for any reason.

These are the words he opposes to Marcuse:

Technological development thus follows a logic that corresponds to the structure of purposive-rational action regulated by its own results, which is in fact the structure of work. Realizing this, it is impossible to envisage how, as long as the organization of human nature does not change and as long therefore as we have to achieve self-preservation through social labor and with the aid of means that substitute for work, we could renounce technology, more particularly our technology, in favor of a qualitatively different one. Marcuse has in mind an alternative attitude to nature, but it does not admit of the idea of a New Technology. [...] We can seek out a fraternal rather than an exploited nature. (Habermas 1970, 87–88)

Thus, Habermas rejects Marcuse's condemnation of science and technology but simultaneously criticizes the idea that science and technology are neutral. The thesis of their alleged neutrality stems from the depoliticization process of the public sphere functional to the legitimacy of the established order in late capitalism. There are different ways of using technology and science. The best way is to use them to defend the wealth of the lifeworld. Habermas also defends the development of productive forces but disputes the idea that it always has only positive effects. For this reason, decisions concerning social life should not be entrusted to the imperatives of technical-scientific progress and economic growth. Imperatives that become increasingly autonomous and indisputable. In summary, Habermas does not like the demonization of science and technology, nor their exaltation, typical of positivism.

It is also useful to recall an important difference with Weber, to whom Habermas acknowledges having realized that the lifeworld must pay a heavy price to capitalist modernization for a new level of systemic differentiation (Habermas 1984, vol. I, 317).

On the relationship between Habermas and rationalization, we must pause briefly.

Does Habermas have a negative idea of rationalization?

As Herbert Schnädelbach pointed out, the left theorists and the conservative and liberal ones, who marked the German critical philosophy of the 1920s and 1930s, were united in giving a negative judgment of rationalization. Since European modernization took place on the wave of the capitalist market economy, the critique of the modern culture of rationality in the twentieth century largely coincided with the critique of capitalism. In Western culture, "rationalism" has become a "swear word"; Weber, Schnädelbach continues, is no exception to this rule, according to which the rationalization process prefigures the formation of a "steel cage," which we have already discussed in the first part of the volume (Schnädelbach 1998, 3).

Habermas recovers the Weberian theme of rationalization but believes that instrumental rationality, which worries Weber, is not the only form of rationality to focus our attention. There is also communicative rationality, which does not lead to a steel cage at all. To clarify his thinking on rationalization, Habermas distinguishes the process of rationalization in the lifeworld from the process of rationalization in the system.

The rationalization of the lifeworld is a good thing. It implies that communication between the speaker and the listener is increasingly based on a series of shared assumptions, so the most cogent argument can prevail due to its convincing force. On the other hand, the rationalization of the system involves the differentiation of

the structures, which become more complex and autonomous, placing themselves in a position to control the lifeworld in an ever more pervasive and effective way. In conclusion, we could say that the rationalization of the lifeworld is a positive fact. In contrast, the rationalization of the system becomes a negative fact when a disjunction between the system and the lifeworld occurs, which is the initiation of the colonization process.

There are two final issues I need to address.

Luhmann Versus Habermas

Speaking of Luhmann, I anticipated how important his debate with Habermas is.

Luhmann wrote that Habermas has an irenic and consensual conception of the lifeworld wholly unjustified and deprived grounded in reality. According to Luhmann, the lifeworld is the world of dissent and conflict. Habermas develops his theory of the rationality of communicative on a false premise. It is in fact empirically false that the seeking of consensus is any more rational than the seeking of dissent. Habermas imagines that the lifeworld is inhabited by people who seek consensus. But sociologists can also imagine that the lifeworld is inhabited by people who seek dissent since confrontation is often more rational than getting along. All depends on the themes of communication and partners. Sociological observation of the lifeworld shows that the more topical the issues, the greater the dissent. The optimistic premise of a pre-existing consensus in the lifeworld can be reversed equally well in a pre-existing dissent. One could then already understand in advance who is of one opinion and who probably of another (Luhmann 2014, 90).

During a conference held in 1986 in Heidelberg, Luhmann arrived at depriving Habermas's theory of communicative action of any sociological utility, reiterating that Habermas implicitly assumes that communication aims at consensus and seeks agreement: "The theory of the rationality of communicative action developed by Habermas is built on this premise. But in fact it is empirically false. Communication can be used to indicate dissent. Strife can be sought" (Luhmann 1992, 255). Luhmann also stated that he finds absurd the idea that there could ever be a lifeworld that is not, in some measure, penetrated by the social system. How could this ever be possible?

Habermas has received much more criticism.

I list only four.

The first is that the communicative action foresees a parity between the interlocutors that could not exist in any real society for the simple fact that some individuals with a fragile and needy personality follow the opinions of others (psychological barrier), while other individuals have a cultural baggage poorer than others (sociological barrier). The fact that two individuals have the opportunity to express themselves freely does not imply that they are on an equal footing and that their opinions have an equal chance of asserting themselves based on the best argument, as the ability to argue clearly and exhaustively also depends on personality, education level, and class social affiliation of the interlocutor.

The second criticism is that Habermas has insisted so much on the importance of understanding in communication, and yet, his convoluted prose is incomprehensible to almost all of his readers.

The third criticism is that two individuals, free to express themselves in the life-world, can understand each other and, at the same time, disagree with each other. Agreement implies understanding, but understanding does not imply agreement.

The fourth criticism is that the Habermas theories are not based on any kind of empirical research. Habermas deals with the social world through speculation alone by proposing a type of more utopian than realistic communication.

The last question I want to touch upon concerns the continuity of Habermas's thought.

Habermas had started dealing with free communication of ideas and opinions in the public sphere since his first book, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, published in 1962 (Habermas 1989), an historical-sociological study of the origins, nature, and evolution of public opinion in democratic societies.

Box 10.4 Public Sphere and Public Opinion

One must be careful not to misunderstand what Habermas means by “public sphere” and “public opinion.” The public sphere is not the sphere under the direct control of state authority. It is the place where citizens meet to discuss freely and rationally about politics and what their governments do, creating a force, public opinion, which limits the power of governments. It is a sphere between civil society and the state where critical public discussion of matters of general interest is institutionally guaranteed (Calhoun 1992, 9).

In the public sphere there are no hierarchical relationships or impositions: “The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public” (Habermas 1989, 27).

In the public sphere, ideally, the best argument tends to prevail. The public sphere is a place of critical discussion that developed through the action of the bourgeoisie in the cafes and clubs of the eighteenth century. Habermas has been pessimistic ever since his first work. In his view, the public sphere has lost much of its autonomy and freedom due to the political and economic centers of power using the mass media to interfere and distort the formation of consensus among private citizens.

The problem is that public opinion is formed in the public sphere. From this first work, Habermas prefigures a process of colonization of the lifeworld. We must always remember the importance of normative dimension in Habermas's thought. The public sphere, understood as a sphere free from domination, is a normative concept, an ideal to strive for.

Bourdieu's Disguised Reproduction of Power

Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) is one of the major exponents of contemporary critical theory. The fundamental concepts of his sociology of conflict are numerous. We will study eight: Field, capital, habitus, symbolic power, symbolic violence, hysteresis, distinction, and reproduction.

I will proceed this way.

First, we will familiarize ourselves with Bourdieu's specialized vocabulary and then study how he used his key concepts in his research. Although Bourdieu is a complex thinker, our previous study of Gramsci, Foucault, and Dahrendorf makes it easier to approach his work.

Like Gramsci, Bourdieu uses military language and attributes decisive importance to the struggle in the superstructure, particularly how the education system works to reproduce the power of the ruling class. Like Foucault, whose work Bourdieu recognizes as “an immense power of attraction” (Bourdieu 2007, 79–82), Bourdieu is interested in the hidden dimension of the power of the ruling class, conceived as a hidden force, which reproduces itself secretly through dissimulation to confuse the dominated as to its purpose.

Bourdieu, too, sees conflict everywhere and, not surprisingly, defines sociology as a symbolic fight, which allows one to defend oneself against the different forms of symbolic violence that can be exercised on citizens. We will see what “symbolic violence” is. For now, let us anticipate that Bourdieu, like the first generation of Frankfurt scholars, conceives sociological theory as a means to free men from oppression or, at least, to make the domination to which they are subjected less painful. He wants to make the hidden power visible to unveil the power mechanisms of social dominion.

However, Marcuse's rhetorical excesses and revolutionary utopianism are absent in Bourdieu.

The Field

Let's start with the concept of “field” that Bourdieu regards as key to every form of knowledge. Understanding means, first of all, understanding the field with which and against which we have been formed.

Bourdieu's image of society is similar to that of Dahrendorf.

Dahrendorf imagines society as a set of associations in which an incessant struggle for power occurs. For Dahrendorf, society is made up of business, academic, sports associations, etc. Similarly, Bourdieu envisions society as a set of fields where men struggle for power: Business, academic, political field, and so on.

The intellectual genealogy of the notion of the field is exposed in Bourdieu's book *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* published in 1992 (Bourdieu 1996), but has repeatedly returned to this concept, providing a substantial number of definitions. In summary, the field is a set of objective social positions which form a network of power relations. Bourdieu uses military language,

which has many similarities with that of Gramsci. The field is also a “battlefield” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 17) made up of strategic positions and “fortresses” to be defended and conquered in a field of struggles (Bourdieu 1984, 244).

Everyone in their field struggles to maintain or acquire a dominant position.

Let us try to summarize, schematically, the attributes of the field.

First, each field has relative autonomy from the other fields and is governed by characteristic laws. Second, the field positions are objective and do not depend on the individual will. The positions are “given,” and the individual moves within a structured, predetermined force field. Third, the field is a relational concept, in that what happens inside it is a dynamic fact that depends on the relationships between its agents: “The real—Bourdieu writes—is relational” (Bourdieu 1992, 67).

Fourth, the political field is in a dominant position with respect to the other fields and affects their structuring. Not surprisingly, when Bourdieu indicates the three fundamental moves to conduct a field analysis, he clarifies that the first move is to define the relationship between the field studied and the political field. The second move involves studying the positions of power within the field. The third move consists of studying the mental structure characterizing the agents who occupy the positions in the field studied or habitus.

The time has come to read one of Bourdieu’s field definitions. Having the embarrassment of choice, I will refer to the words he used in a November 1995 conference in Lyons at the end of his intellectual career to grasp the most mature and meditated definition of this intellectual tool. Bourdieu reiterates that each field is an autonomous world, a microcosm inserted within the social macrocosm. It is a sort of small universe that lives within the laws of functioning of the social universe of which it is a part, and yet is endowed with relative autonomy within this great universe and obeys its own rules, its *nomos*; a small universe which is characterized by being, in a word, autonomous. The field is an almost separate universe, yet not entirely independent of external laws (Bourdieu 2005, 32).

Capital and Habitus

Capital is the fundamental resource for participating in the struggle in the field. In his works, Bourdieu mentions various types of capital, including academic capital and scientific or intellectual capital (Naidoo 2004, 458).

However, there are four main types: Economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital. Economic capital is given by money and property; social capital results from social relations and networks of influence; cultural capital is the baggage of knowledge and formal qualifications issued by the education system; symbolic capital is based on prestige and honor. The habitus, the cognitive structure through which the individual interprets the world, also counts in the fight in the field. It is worth noting that, according to Bourdieu, the habitus is both an individual acquisition and a class asset that can function as capital to improve life chances. Habitus is the mental structure the individual acquires from its class. Habitus is the product of the internalization of the structures of one’s social world (Bourdieu 1989, 18).

Bourdieu develops the concept of habitus to support a sociology of the perception of the social world.

Although Bourdieu provides many definitions of habitus, he does not create confusion because his numerous definitions do not change in substance.

In one of his major works, *Distinction*, published in 1979, I found out that Bourdieu refers to habitus using eight different terms in a passage of a few lines. Habitus are “cognitive structures,” “embodied social structures,” “classificatory schemes,” “forms of classification,” “mental structures,” “symbolic forms,” “historical schemes of perception and appreciation,” and “principles of division.”

Habitus is similar to Gramsci’s “common sense,” as it seems to emerge from the words we are about to read.

To highlight the similarities between these two fundamental concepts, let’s read Bourdieu’s own words:

The cognitive structures which social agents implement in their practical knowledge of the social world are internalized, ‘embodied’ social structures. The practical knowledge of the social world that is presupposed by ‘reasonable’ behavior within it implements classificatory schemes (or ‘forms of classification,’ ‘mental structures’ or ‘symbolic forms’—apart from their connotations, these expressions are virtually interchangeable), historical schemes of perception and appreciation which are the product of the objective division into classes (age groups, genders, social classes) and which function below the level of consciousness and discourse. Being the product of the incorporation of the fundamental structures of a society, these principles of division are common to all the agents of the society and make possible the production of a common, meaningful world, a common-sense world. (Bourdieu 1984, 468)

Being the internalization of one’s social class, the habitus influences how we dress, talk, walk, sit at the table, and much more. Its purpose is not knowledge but practical action. The regularity that marks the rhythm of daily life—Bourdieu explains in *The Logic of Practice* published in 1980—is based on a practical logic, that is, a theoretical and, at the same time, praxis-oriented logic that guides our actions and judgments about the world.

When the individual acts in a field with an inadequate habitus and assumes attitudes that do not conform to the dominant rules, Bourdieu says it suffers from “hysteresis” (Bourdieu 1990, 62; 2000; Hardy 2008) against which the dominant factions hurl their symbolic violence, “the gentle, invisible form of violence,” never recognized as such, exercised on the dominated with their complicity (Bourdieu 1977, 192). Symbolic violence is the most economical mode of domination. It comprises the gentle violence of credit, confidence, obligation, personal loyalty, hospitality, gifts, gratitude, piety, and all the virtues honored by the code of honor.

The dominated are complicit in the violence exerted on them to the extent that the hierarchical organization of the camp appears to them as a “natural” fact. By accepting the rules of the field, the dominated factions legitimize the domination of the dominant factions and the blows they receive from them. Legitimizing the rules of the field also implies legitimizing symbolic violence.

There is another important consideration to be made regarding habitus.

Habitus not only can determine the failure of an undertaking but can also induce not to attempt it. Renunciation, a form of preventive defeat, can also occur when the internalization of one's subordinate class forges a habitus that leads the individual to believe it is not up to the challenges of climbing the social pyramid. This is the case of the student who, coming from a family with very little capital, gives up enrolling at the University because he/she thinks he/she is not up to it. The individual carries his/her habitus with him/her in all fields in which he/she acts. One cannot strip oneself of one's social class with a simple act of the will. Habitus facilitates the perpetuation of inequality: "Individuals internalize their class status and social position into their tastes and worldview, which then reinforce that very same social position and unconsciously reproduce one's status" (Lee and Kramer 2013, 18–19).

However, Bourdieu does not conceive of habitus as a prison for life. Habitus does not imply any determinism. Habitus predisposes and does not determine the action. Bourdieu recognizes a relative level of autonomy for the individual. The social actor can act against the provisions of their habitus, which can be changed.

Bourdieu used the concepts of field and habitus to overcome the contrast between structuralism and constructivism. The field and habitus represent the objective and subjective elements. Durkheim's theory of social facts is cited as an example of objectivism, while phenomenology, ethnomethodology, and symbolic interactionism, as examples of subjectivism (Bourdieu 1989, 15).

According to Bourdieu, objectivism neglects the importance of the actor to focus on the strength of social structures. In contrast, subjectivism neglects the strength of social structures to focus on the cognitive schemata with which individuals construct social reality. Bourdieu wrote that his sociology is a case of "constructivist structuralism" or "structuralist constructivism" (Bourdieu 1989, 14). With this formula, Bourdieu wants to enhance the role of the structure through the field and the role of the individual through the habitus.

In his words:

By structuralism or structuralist, I mean that there exist, within the social world itself and not only within symbolic systems (language, myths, etc.), objective structures independent of the consciousness and will of agents, which are capable of guiding and constraining their practices or their representations. By constructivism, I mean that there is a twofold social genesis, on the one hand of the schemes of perception, thought, and action which are constitutive of what I call habitus, and on the other hand of social structures, and particularly of what I call fields and of groups, notably those we ordinarily call social classes. (Bourdieu 1989, 14)

One of the most famous phrases of contemporary sociological thought is comprised in Bourdieu's *Distinction*, according to which the habitat is a "structuring structure" and, at the same time, a "structured structure." Bourdieu means that habitus is structured by the social world and, at the same time, structures it. Bourdieu's social agent partly reasons with his own head and, partly, reasons with that of the class to which he/she belongs:

The habitus is not only a structuring structure, which organizes practices and the perception of practices, but also a structured structure: the principle of division into logical classes

which organizes the perception of the social world is itself the product of internalization of the division into social classes. [...] This means that inevitably inscribed within the dispositions of the habitus is the whole structure of the system of conditions, as it presents itself in the experience of a life-condition occupying a particular position within that structure. (Bourdieu 1984, 170–172)

More than an effective overcoming of the contrast between objectivism and subjectivism, Bourdieu's theory perhaps marks a step forward in this direction, to which Anthony Giddens also devoted himself, with great commitment, in his *The Constitution of Society* (Giddens 1984). If Bourdieu's individuals act and elaborate their strategies according to the mental schemes of their class, the space for individual autonomy is necessarily reduced.

Bourdieu was highly critical of Raymond Boudon's methodological individualism (Bourdieu 1996, 179) to whom he sent poisoned arrows, even on a personal level (Bourdieu 2007, 75).

Don't be surprised: Speaking of his own habitus, Bourdieu attributed to himself "a difficult character" and a tendency to be indignant about anything (Bourdieu 2007, 94).

In any case, his structuralism appears more accentuated than his constructivism in many points of his work, for example, on a page of *The Rules of Art*, in which he describes capital as the decisive element in the life trajectories of artists. Bourdieu makes the courage, creativity, and originality of artists depend on their capital since, as he writes, capital «is a force inscribed in the objectivity of things, which ensures that not everything is equally possible or impossible» (Bourdieu [1983] 2015, 82). Bourdieu writes that capital "is a force inscribed in the objectivity of things so that everything is not equally possible or impossible" (Bourdieu 1986, 15).

The artists with more courage in experimentation, that is, those who abandon the old road to try the new one, are the richest in economic, cultural, and social capital. This condition seems to occur in all fields and not only in the artistic one. Bourdieu cites the example of Paul Bourget, who abandons Symbolist poetry for a new form of the novel (Bourdieu 1996, 262).

The willingness to audacity and the artists' indifference to material profits are favored by the conditions of existence associated with their high-ranking origin. On the other hand, the scarcity of capital pushes writers of the popular classes toward conformity. In summary, if an artist is rich in economic, cultural, and social capital, he/she will be more willing to take the risk of experimenting to conquer the capital in which he/she is scarce, the symbolic one, which he/she hopes to hoard, conquering success in an unexplored genre, where competition is still scarce.

A few pages later, Bourdieu attenuates his structuralism, clarifying that a dominant position can only be exploited with an adequate habitus. Potentialities can be realized only through the individual's capacity to adjust his/her habitus to new conditions and situations. Richard Jenkins is among those who believe that Bourdieu's sociology is far more objectivist than subjectivist. Bourdieu's goal of transcending the objectivist/subjectivist divide in the hope of constructing a sociology that adequately bridges the gap between individual agency and social structure "is a failure, albeit an impressive and interesting failure" (Jenkins 1992, 91).

Taste as a Weapon

Bourdieu's research makes it easy to grasp the peculiar aspects of his approach. I will consider research on taste culture and research on the education system.

In one of his major works, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1979), Bourdieu explains that individuals of the upper classes use similar values and aesthetic standards to distinguish themselves from the lower classes. By "distinction," we must understand the use of culture to keep subordinate groups at a distance. It is the mechanism described by Simmel in the "fashion game." For example, a student who knows classical music enjoys higher social prestige than peers who only listen to popular music. Taste culture applies also to cinema, literature, art, history.

How does all this contribute to the reproduction of social order in favor of the ruling classes? We find Bourdieu's answer in another of his major works, *Reproduction*, published with Jean-Claude Passeron in 1970 (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977).

Higher-grade students believe that their academic success depends on their individual qualities. The student believes in what he/she sees. He/she answered all the questions and passed the oral exams brilliantly. In reality, the decisive social game is played upstream. Working-class parents have limited cultural capital; consequently, their children have limited means to face the struggle for higher qualifications.

This struggle also takes place through habitus.

The school considers "refined," "cultured," and "beautiful," which is such for the ruling class. It follows that the children of the upper classes will not have particular difficulties in achieving the standards of excellence since the tastes and conduct considered excellent by their parents are also excellent for teachers. The children of the upper classes, having the impression that the social order reproduces itself fairly and legitimately, will eventually judge the dominant position of their class to be just and legitimate. This allows the reproduction of the social order without particular disturbances since the order that benefits the rulers takes place with the participation of the dominated, who agree to participate in a game where some have the means to run and others to walk.

Think, for example, of what happens to a society where it is necessary to accumulate more and more educational qualifications to aspire to a prestigious job. If the number of dominated people who manage to graduate increases, the ruling class can establish a new system of rules that requires more than a degree to get a good job. Since the graduate children of wealthy families have the resources to study longer, the gap between them and the graduate children of the lower classes starts to grow again. Even the most disadvantaged men tend to perceive the world as natural and accept it much more easily than one might imagine. When the dominated look at the world with the "social eyes" of the dominant, social reproduction can occur without conflict and the established order can be considered ingrained in the brains of ordinary people (Bourdieu 1989, 18).

On closer inspection, we are grappling with Gramsci's common sense. People accept dominant models, which they take for granted. But we also find Dahrendorf's idea, according to which school is fundamental in assigning roles of power and, therefore, in social mobility, which awaits young students. With an important difference: Dahrendorf thinks that the school favors individual talent and tends toward optimism; Bourdieu thinks that the school does not create equal starting conditions and tends to pessimism.

Bourdieu tried to base his thesis by studying the selection mechanisms for accessing the Grande Écoles, which prepares the children of the French upper classes to enter the "state aristocracy." His data confirm that the selection is overwhelmingly won by students who come from a few prestigious high schools and the children of the upper class because "social origin predetermines educational destiny" (Bourdieu 1977, 80). Bourdieu sarcastically calls these young people the "elect" or the "miraculous oblates," remembering that he was admitted to the Grande École Normale Supérieure in rue d'Ulm in 1951.

Bourdieu deals with the same research topic as Parsons: The reproduction of the social order (Deer 2003, 200). The difference is that Bourdieu deals with reproduction based on conflict, while Parsons deals with reproduction based on consent.

In *Reproduction*, Bourdieu brings to maturity over ten years of reflections on symbolic violence and how society conceals this type of violence. *Reproduction* leads us, once again, to Foucault's discourse on the hidden power of the ruling class. Every power carries out symbolic violence to impose and legitimize meanings, disguising the relations of force on which its strength is based. Each ruling class adds peculiar symbolic violence to these existing objective power relations. This means that symbolic violence does not coincide entirely with power relations. Symbolic violence is a further element of strength used by the ruling class to reproduce its domination without unleashing conflicts. The symbolic violence of the dominant grows to the extent that it manages to keep its intentions hidden from the dominated, which, by not grasping the mechanisms of reproduction of the privileges of the ruling class, accepts its meanings imposed in the struggle. The ruling class knows that it has to fight with the ruled class and chooses weapons to be more likely to prevail. Taste is one of these weapons. Taste works as a system of differences that manifests the most radical social differences through a symbolic battle.

Bourdieu also seeks the hidden power of the ruling classes in photography, to which he dedicates a volume, *Photography, a Middle-brow Art*, published in 1965 (Bourdieu 1990).

The photographer's shot seems a technical gesture, a simple automatism, but the shots and subjects are his/her choice, which is far from abandoned to the anarchy of individual improvisation. Each photograph embodies an entire social universe, based on the division of society into classes, internalized by the photographer. The photographer's shots are inseparable from the system of implicit values of a class, profession, or school of art, and of which photographic aesthetics are always an aspect despite his/her claims of autonomy (Bourdieu 1990, 6).

The norms which organize the photographic valuation of the world in terms of the opposition between that which is photographable and that which is not are

indissociable from the implicit system of values maintained by a class, profession, or artistic coterie, of which the photographic aesthetic must always be one aspect even if it desperately claims autonomy.

But it is in his *Homo Academicus*, published in 1984, that Bourdieu deals with the field he claims to despise most deeply, the academic field, with which he has an ambivalent and controversial relationship, since Bourdieu, as an academic, declares to have a certain contempt even toward himself and his best students.

Behind a rigorous sociological analysis, *Homo Academicus* hides a deep disgust for the so-called academic dynamics, which are ways of thinking and acting that respect specific laws, and for the struggles with which professors always strive to acquire a more conspicuous symbolic capital, that is, the struggles they lead to become more famous than their colleagues. In the very rich pages of this work, Bourdieu analyzes how professors exercise their control over academic competitions to recruit new colleagues, noting how often the professors who judge are less qualified than candidates who are judged.

I have recalled four types of capital, but, in reality, Bourdieu thinks there are as many types of capital as there are fields. There is also academic capital, which professors must reproduce to reproduce the power they wield in their field. Bourdieu also describes how full professors use their academic capital to submit graduate students to their will in the hope of controlling them when they become the dominating professors of tomorrow. Academic capital is obtained and maintained by occupying positions that allow one to dominate other positions and those who occupy them (Bourdieu 1988, 84–89).

Bourdieu's fundamental lesson is that there is no greater power than a power that reproduces itself without opposition and that we can be sure that whenever the social order appears to us as a natural fact, power has taken root in our heads. This discourse also concerns sexuality, couple relationships, and the way of conceiving the family. All that is "natural" does not have to justify itself.

In *Masculine Domination*, published in 1998, Bourdieu explains that man's power is transformed into absolute domination over bodies, when it manages to present itself as a natural order. The success of male domination lies in the fact that it must not justify itself. The androcentric view of the world imposes itself as neutral and does not need to waste time in speeches aimed at legitimizing it. The social order functions as an immense symbolic machine working for the male domination on which it is based.

Once again, Bourdieu is interested in a "cognitive revolution" affecting the practice to transform the present state of the material and symbolic power relations between the sexes.

Leaning on his previous research conducted between 1958 and 1961 in Algeria on the androcentric structures of Kabyles, a Berber ethnic group (Bourdieu 1979), Bourdieu explains that women are victims of a male conception of the world portraying itself as "natural." Still, the androcentric mental structure is not natural at all. It is a cultural product with which men satisfy their thirst for domination. Women integrate this androcentric concept into their way of thinking, which results in the unconscious acceptance of their inferiority.

Bourdieu also advocated the importance of a “reflexive sociology,” a sociology critical of itself, exposing how sociologists deceptively use methodological arguments to hide attempts to increase the cultural capital with which to struggle to gain more symbolic power (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992).

What sociologists depict as the best way to do research is often just the way to do research that suits them best. A sociologist will find it easier to write scientific books and articles working with the methodologies he/she is most adept with. Moreover, suppose his/her way of conducting sociological research becomes dominant and establishes the criteria for awarding prestigious prizes and professorships at the university. In that case, he/she will be more likely to assume a dominant position in the academic field. In this way, the personal limitations of a sociologist—the fact that he/she is unfamiliar with history, theory, field research, etc.—are transformed into the merits of his/her colleagues or young scholars. Dominant sociologists often impose their limitations on others. In sum, there are many ways of conceiving of the sociology discipline. Each sociologist is interested in seeing his/her way prevailing over the others.

Ethnographic Research on Symbolic Violence in an Italian Hospital

Between 2018 and 2019, I conducted ethnographic research, based on participant observation, in the pediatric ward of a public hospital in central Italy to study the relationship between pregnant immigrants of the Islamic religion and gynecologists. I wanted to study the conflict that arises between the husbands of Islamic women, who do not want their wives to strip in front of men and demand respect for their religious sentiment, and gynecologists and male trainees, who demand respect for their rights to exercise their profession, without being discriminated against on the basis of their sex.

In most cases, male and female gynecologists had devised some informal methods to please Islamic couples, but their availability ran into several problems.

First of all, hospital regulations prohibit pregnant women from deciding the sex of the gynecologist by whom they will be examined.

Furthermore, the request of Islamic spouses hindered the training of male gynecologists. This triggered a series of conflicts, multiple and intertwined, between numerous actors in different positions in the hospital field.

I identified at least three main conflicts: (a) A conflict between uncompromising gynecologists and Islamic spouses; (b) a conflict between accommodating gynecologists and uncompromising gynecologists; and (c) a conflict between gynecologists accommodating the demand of Muslims and male apprentices. In the words of one of these trainees: “I feel mortified in my professionalism every time I am left outside the door. I’m a doctor, not a voyeur.”

My focus has been on uncompromising gynecologists.

I noticed that all of them had male interns among their assistants. I interviewed an uncompromising gynecologist and, to push her to open up, I supported the reasons of the Muslims. The gynecologist, very annoyed, said in a tone of voice full of contempt: “Excuse me, you are an Italian. Still, your attitudes seem very backward

to me. Your ideas seem to me as backward as those of Pakistanis who do not want their wives to strip in front of the trainees.” How can we interpret such an answer?

I quote an excerpt from my ethnographic notebook:

My impression is that the female gynaecologist [name omitted], occupying a dominant position in the hospital field, tries to impose her meanings, the “right” meanings, stigmatizing the habitus that she considers inappropriate to the rules of the game. The fighting technique of uncompromising gynaecologists consists of trying to mortify Islamic husbands, making them feel culturally backward.

However, Muslim husbands continued to oppose, depriving symbolic violence of its effectiveness. It is important to distinguish between the use and effectiveness of symbolic violence. According to Bourdieu, the fundamental elements of symbolic violence are two: Domination and complicity.

During my research, I also collected the opinion of some Catholic Italian women. One of them said: “I have always lived with a great deal of shame at having to be naked in front of interns when I was pregnant. I wanted to be visited by a woman. And then I was afraid to reveal my embarrassment for fear of seeming backward or out of place. But in the end, I realized that even male postgraduates must be able to train like female postgraduates to become professional gynecologists.”

The testimony of this Italian woman, who undresses in front of doctors against her will, can be interpreted as a case of internalization of the rules of the group in a dominant position by an actor in a subordinate position.

I quote another comment of mine from my ethnographic notebook:

I seem to grasp a contradiction in the Italian cultural system. Italian society instills in children a strong sense of gender difference, for example, by separating girls’ bathrooms from boys’ bathrooms since kindergarten. This separation helps to shape a particular sense of shame in the child, who is taught that it is unfortunate to be seen naked by peers of the other sex. However, when the child becomes an adult and enters the gynaecology ward, she is asked to cancel the sense of shame that she has instilled in her.

I abruptly stopped my research due to the provisions against COVID-19, which drastically limited hospital access.

Bourdieu had the merit of summarizing the fundamental aspects of his thought in a few pages. His best academic summary is in a ten-page article, “Social Space and Symbolic Power,” published in 1989 (Bourdieu 1989, 14–25). For students approaching Bourdieu for the first time, its best synthesis is contained in *Sketch for a Self-Analysis* published in France in 2004 (Bourdieu 2007), but also in *Sociology in Questions* which collects a series of lectures and interviews offering an accessible introduction to Bourdieu’s ideas (Bourdieu 1993).

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have explored how Marxist theory contributed to understanding social conflict by reviewing Gramsci, Lukács, and the Frankfurt School, also known as the critical theory. After studying these great Marxist theorists, we have learned to understand the limits of Marxism better thanks to the work of liberal theorists like Dahrendorf. Marxist theorists primarily studied how conflict breaks down society. Instead, Dahrendorf and Coser studied how it makes them more cohesive. Including liberal and Marxist theorists in the same conflict theory chapter made the merits and limitations of their theories more evident.

While Horkheimer, Adorno, Fromm, and Marcuse tend to conceive power as a rather abstract force that takes possession of the minds of individuals, Charles Wright Mills provides a more concrete understanding of power by identifying the actual individuals who hold it: Flesh-and-blood men and women. They are the billionaires of the big economic groups, the high military ranks, and the top political leaders. The “power elite” comprises small corrupt factions operating for their benefit and plotting against human development.

The section dedicated to Habermas is particularly dense also because it includes Austin’s Speech Act Theory. We studied many aspects of Habermas’s thought, including his theory of communicative action, the claims of validity of the linguistic act, his critique of technocratic ideology, and his thesis on the colonization of the lifeworld. Habermas is a fascinating author, and his theory of the colonization of the lifeworld is compelling. Who wouldn’t want to defend the quality of their human relationships from the cynicism and opportunism of the system? But then the text gives the floor to Luhmann, who exposes Habermas’s theory’s limits and logical flaws.

Bourdieu’s theory is no less compelling than Habermas’s. Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic violence is essential not only from a scientific point of view but also from a pedagogical point of view since it helps oppressed and discriminated people to understand when they themselves are complicit in the psychological violence that the dominant classes exercise on them to subjugate them. Bourdieu teaches us that oppressed people often favor their oppressors without realizing it. In this chapter, I also reported the results of my research in an Italian hospital to show that symbolic violence is difficult to see without a powerful theoretical apparatus, confirming Malinowski’s thesis encountered in the chapter on functionalism, according to which ethnographic research should be guided by sociological theory. Without the concept of symbolic violence, I would not have been able to reconstruct the tight-woven of the conflicts between the actors in that particular “field” or the pediatric ward.

Self-Test Path

1. Talk about Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony.
2. Talk about the concept of "reification" according to Lukács.
3. Talk about the critical theory of society.
4. Talk about Dahrendorf's conflict theory.
5. What are the main social functions of conflict, according to Coser?
6. Talk about Habermas's theory of communicative action.
7. What does the colonization of the lifeworld consist of?
8. Talk about Austin's theory of speech acts.
9. Can you explain the concepts of field, habitus, and capital in Bourdieu?
10. What is "symbolic violence"?
11. Talk about the ethnographic research on Muslim women giving birth in the Italian hospital and how it helps better understand what symbolic violence is.
12. Sometimes, symbolic violence fails. Can you give an example of the failure of symbolic violence?

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